



# **A. C. BRADLEY'S CRITICISM OF 'HAMLET' AND 'KING LEAR'**

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF**

**Master of Philosophy**

**IN**

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**BY**

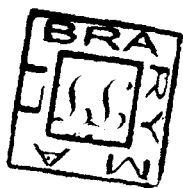
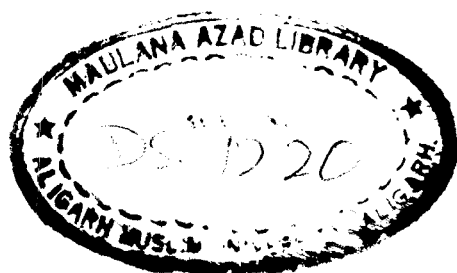
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**DEDICATED**

**To**

**MY TEACHER**

**SHRI RAMANAND SINGH PUNDIR**

**(PRINCIPAL, SARASWATI VIDYALAYA, PUNWARKA, SAHARANPUR)**

**WHO IS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION TO ME**


DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
AND  
MODERN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES



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Dated: 8 October 1987

This is to certify that  
Mr Mahendra Singh has prepared his  
M.Phil. dissertation on A.C. Bradley's  
Criticism of "Hamlet" and "King Lear"  
under my supervision. Mr Singh's  
dissertation is an original piece of  
work based on his own study of the  
subject.

  
( Magbool Hasan Khan )  
Professor of English

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## PREFACE

The present work is an attempt to study Bradley's criticism of Hamlet and King Lear in the broad perspective of a well-considered approach to his magnum opus, Shakespearian Tragedy. The main contention in the present piece of research is that to regard Bradley as a mere psychological critic who insists on verisimilitude as the sole criterion for evaluating Shakespearian drama is a gross misrepresentation of Bradley's work. There is little doubt that Bradley can only be placed in the romantic tradition of Shakespearian criticism; Shakespearian Tragedy may indeed be regarded as the last noteworthy document of the romantic criticism of Shakespeare. However, romantic tradition itself is broad enough to include besides character-criticism, a philosophical- poetic approach to Shakespeare. The submission here is that Bradley's ideas about psychological verisimilitude operate within the broader framework of his views of Shakespeare's conception of tragedy, and that his views on the subject are of a philosophical nature. Bradley's criticism of Hamlet and King Lear, illustrates how considerations of character and verisimilitude are fused into a synthesis the nature of which transcends psychology, a synthesis that has not been surpassed even in the best of the twentieth century Shakespearian criticism.

I am deeply indebted to Katharine Cooke's book, A.C.Bradley and his Influence on Twentieth Century Shakespeare Criticism, for the wealth of its material from

present-day Shakespeare criticism. Let me, however, point out that the approach outlined above is independent of her work as is also my discussion of Bradley's criticism of Hamlet and King Lear. Similarly, my treatment of the earlier criticism of the two plays is not entirely derived from P.S.Conklin's history of Hamlet criticism and similar works. I have made an attempt in the second chapter to rely mainly on my own readings of the earlier criticism made available in India in the volumes of the Critical Heritage series. Furness's New Variorum Volumes too, needless to say, were extremely useful for their ample extracts from the nineteenth century criticism of Shakespeare.

I am grateful to the staff of Maulana Azad Library for help in getting access to the rich material in the archives of the Library and also for help in obtaining books from the National Library, Calcutta, through the Inter-Library Loan Scheme.

I am indebted to Professor Munir Ahmad, Chairman, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh for encouragement of various kinds, and to my supervisor, Professor Maqbool Hasan Khan, for guidance and helpful suggestions all of which have been incorporated in the text.

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION



The Shakespearian Criticism of A.C. Bradley<sup>1</sup>, specially his classic lectures on Shakespearian Tragedy (1904), can now be viewed in the correct historical perspective. The reaction against him, initiated by the 'realistic' or historical school of critics (such as Stoll and Schucking) and continued by the 'poetic' critics like L.C. Knights and F.R. Leavis<sup>2</sup>, was over by the 'sixties'. His reputation as a major Shakespearian critic who may still be read with profit is now firmly established. It is now realized that far from being a mere psychological critic who raised irrelevant questions about Shakespeare's characters, Bradley was in fact concerned with the imaginative core of the plays. Critics now generally feel that what Bradley says about the major tragedies is related to the heart of these great works of imagination. However, it is not yet clearly realized that Bradley represents the culmination of the philosophical approach to Shakespearian drama initiated first by Coleridge<sup>3</sup> early in the nineteenth century. The main contention in the present piece of research is that Bradley's 'character-criticism' is subject to, and conditioned by, his philosophical conception of Shakespearian tragedy. It would, therefore, be improper to describe Bradley as a 'character-chaser'. In this study of his criticism of Hamlet and King Lear we shall try to show that Bradley's criticism has illuminated vital areas of these plays and also that his criticism finds echoes in the major Shakespearian criticism of the present century. However, before we come to the main subject of our discussion, it would be proper to take into account certain general considerations relating to Bradley's criticism of Shakespearian drama.

The main complaint against Bradley, as we shall see in our concluding chapter, has been that he approached Shakespearian drama purely from the psychological angle, and that this psychological point of view is a limiting factor. S.L. Bethell, for example, complains that Shakespeare as we

find him in Bradley's pages is 'a sadly diminished and distorted figure'.<sup>4</sup> Bethell's own criticism of Shakespeare is of the historical variety. He finds that Bradley has totally ignored the traditional element in Shakespeare. This has indeed a long-standing complaint against Bradley. As we shall see in detail in our last chapter, this was the gist of the criticism of Stoll and Schucking in their reaction against Bradley. In the hundreds of references to Bradley and in the innumerable remarks on his criticism in twentieth century Shakespearian criticism, the great majority suggests that Bradley was a psychological critic who confined himself only to the study of Shakespeare's characters. Even the sympathetic critics of Bradley imply a similar assessment of Bradley's achievement. H.B. Charlton, the author of a well-known book on Shakespearian tragedy, defends Bradley by suggesting that his method of character-study was the established method used by the great critics of the past. He says,

Bradley's method was not new, and indeed, particularly in phrase, or at times even in diagnosis, it may not be approved by the particular psychological doctrines of today. But it is essentially the method of our greatest Shakespearian critics, and is none the worse for having been traditional for over two centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Charlton's view is not correct because the neo-classical criticism of Shakespeare was not character-criticism. Dr Johnson, too, does not mention any characters in his great Preface. He writes about Shakespeare's characters only in his Notes on the plays. Moreover, he always praises Shakespearian characterisation for its generic qualities, not for its individualisation. Character criticism begins with Morgann towards the end of the eighteenth century and it flourished in the nineteenth century. By implication Charlton

praises Bradley for the very qualities for which he is condemned by his opponents.

Another sympathetic critic of Bradley is Barbara Everett. Her essay on "The New King Lear" has done a lot in the rehabilitation of Bradley during the recent years.<sup>6</sup> She is one of the very few critics to recognize that there is a philosophical or "transcendental" element in Bradley. She writes in her essay :

Bradley's profound study of the play (King Lear) is remarkable, both for the way in which he feels a romantic sympathy for, or participation in , the central character to an extreme degree, and also for the way in which he soberly refuses to take it any further. If he directs the reader to a more 'transcendental' interpretation of the play, he does so hesitantly, hedging his observations round with careful reservations.<sup>7</sup>

Still another recent defender of Bradley, John Bayley, too, does not believe that Bradley can be defended as a philosophical critic who presented Shakespeare as a man of vision. On the other hand, he merely defends Bradley by saying that his character criticism is valid :

One can be sure that somewhere in the mind of (Shakespeare) the problem of Lady Macbeth's children would find its appropriate resolution.<sup>8</sup>

The problem of Lady Macbeth's children, as we all know, was first raised by L.C. Knights in his essay "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth ?" In his attack on Bradley's method, Knights had suggested that the problems raised by Bradley in his Notes to Shakespearian Tragedy were entirely irrelevant to an appreciation of Shakespeare's plays. Bayley, on the other hand, is suggesting here that these problems are actually relevant to the plays. He has not presented any new grounds for Bradley's

defence. If this is the case with those who are sympathetic towards Bradley, what can be expected from his opponents ?

Clifford Leech writes :

Critics who have parted company with Bradley have accused him of giving a too preponderant attention to the character of the hero, of treating the play (Hamlet) like a nineteenth century novel, of neglecting its poetry, and of being insufficiently versed in Elizabethan thought and stage-conditions.<sup>9</sup>

Bradley's name has become so closely associated with character criticism that the process of character analysis has been named after him: "character analysis in the Bradleian manner". It is wrong to suppose, as Katharine Cooke points out,<sup>10</sup> that Bradley was criticised for his character analysis only by L.C. Knights and other critics of the 'poetic' school. This kind of criticism had begun immediately after the publication of Shakespearian Tragedy. A.B. Walkley, a well known dramatic critic of the early twentieth century, associated Bradley with character criticism and found fault with him for the same reason<sup>11</sup>. He disputes Bradley's characterization of Hamlet as "a popular youth, an actor and a fencer". According to Walkley, this description is of a real-life youngman, not of Shakespeare's hero. "Does it not occur to Professor Bradley that these things are thus because Shakespeare wanted (1) a sympathetic hero, (2) an amateur of acting (or what would have become of the play-scene ?) and (3) a fencer for the denouement ?" Walkley further continues:

To understand Shakespeare you have to supplement examination of the text by consideration of other matters, and it is here that we hold the Professor to be at fault. What is outside the text ? He says (by implication) a set of real lives...We say

Shakespeare's dramatic needs of the moment,  
artistic peculiarities, and available  
theatrical materials.

This is not the place to discuss the virtues or drawbacks of Bradley's character-analysis. We shall return to the subject briefly at the end of this chapter. Walkley has been quoted above in order to show that Bradley has been associated with character criticism right from the beginning. His extra-ordinary popularity among the students and teachers of Shakespeare has largely been due to his ability to analyse Shakespeare's characters in an almost perfect manner. His discussion, for example, of the different theories of Hamlet's delay can be easily summarised and categorised. Another example is his discussion of Iago's motives. The greater part of the book reveals Bradley's remarkable ability to analyse literary and dramatic problems in a cool, systematic and rational manner. Bradley never goes beyond the text in his analysis of characters. The charge that he treats Shakespeare's characters as if they were real men and women is not fair; Bradley gives the characters as he finds them in the text. However, while reading Shakespearian Tragedy, we do feel that we are dealing with real human beings, their problems and mutual conflicts. The poetic or thematic critics, on the other hand, give the impression that they are dealing with abstractions and not with human beings. The poetic criticism of Shakespeare may be full of insight but it is difficult to make much use of it while teaching the undergraduates. This point has been ably made by Katharine Cooke in her book on Bradley.<sup>12</sup>

Bradley's great success notwithstanding he has generally been misrepresented in critical comments and surveys. Though Eastman, in his history of Shakespearian criticism defends the character criticism of Bradley, he criticises him

for indulging in fruitless philosophical speculation about Shakespearian tragedy.<sup>13</sup> According to him, Bradley misinterprets the substance of Shakespearian tragedy in its three aspects: the tragic trait, the tragic impression and the tragic triumph or reconciliation. As a matter of fact, it is he who misinterprets Bradley's interpretation. He believes Bradley's conception of Shakespearian tragedy to be anachronistic in that Bradley has discovered the philosophy of creative evolution in Shakespeare. Such a view of life, Eastman thinks, could not have been anticipated by the great Elizabethan dramatist writing at the end of the sixteenth century. He quotes the following passage from the first chapter of Shakespearian Tragedy and describes the philosophy therein contained as that of "creative evolution":

We remain confronted with the inexplicable fact, or the no less inexplicable appearance, of a world travailing for perfection, but bringing to birth, together with glorious good, and evil which it is able to overcome only by self-torture and self-waste, and this fact or appearance is tragedy.<sup>14</sup>

As we shall see in the next section, Bradley was helped in his appreciation of the substance of Shakespearian tragedy by the ideas of Aristotle and Hegel. The view presented in the above quoted passage by Bradley is ultimately derived from Hegel's dialectical idealism; it is not "creative evolution". Eastman is wrong about the source of Bradley's ideas perhaps because he does not pay enough attention to them. He seems to be prejudiced against the philosophical interpretation of Shakespeare. It is for the same reason that he praises the second chapter of Bradley's book because in that chapter Bradley discusses only the technical aspect of Shakespearian tragedy. It is probable that Eastman arrived at the relative merit of the two chapters after reading an early review of Bradley's Shakespearian Tragedy. R.Y. Tyrrell wrote in the Academy :

The first lecture, perhaps the least good in the book, is suspiciously like a sop thrown to the 'dons'. It consists in a generalisation with regard to the substance of Shakespearian tragedy in the abstract, a subject which would never occupy the attention of anyone except a professional academic critic. And indeed it is not a matter of great importance...that 'the tragic fact' should be accurately defined.<sup>15</sup>

It is contended here that the above assessment of the value of the first chapter of Bradley's book is not correct. A proper evaluation of Bradley's contribution to Shakespearian criticism cannot be made without giving proper attention to what he says about the substance of Shakespearian tragedy. In the introduction to Shakespearian Tragedy Bradley wrote:

...before coming to the first of the four tragedies, I propose to discuss some preliminary matters which concern them all. Though each is individual through and though, they have, in a sense one and the same substance; for in all of them Shakespeare represents the tragic aspect of life, the tragic fact (ST,p.3) .

The above remark implies that the criticism of the individual tragedies is thoroughly conditioned by Bradley's view of the substance of Shakespearian tragedy. This is exactly what we intend to prove in our discussion of Bradley's criticism of Hamlet and King Lear.

Whether Bradley's ideas about Shakespearian tragedy were anachronistic or not cannot be proved in a positive manner. Certain facts, however, may be mentioned. These facts, it is hoped, will go a long way in showing that Bradley had done his best to be as objective about Shakespearian tragedy as it was possible for him to be. However, before we come to

these facts about Bradley's development as a critic, it is necessary to say a few words about Shakespeare criticism before Bradley in order to show that Bradley was trying to fulfil a long-felt need in Shakespeare criticism.

The neo-classical critics of Shakespeare in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not concern themselves with Shakespeare's "philosophy" of life or his tragic or comic vision. They lavishly praised Shakespeare for his superb imitation of Nature. Dryden credited him with "the largest and most comprehensive soul". According to him, "All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily".<sup>16</sup> It implies that Shakespeare was a perfect imitator of Nature, giving in his plays living portraits of men and women. Dr Johnson, too, praised Shakespeare for the same qualities:

This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirrour of life; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writer raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious extasies, by reading human sentiments in human language; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.<sup>17</sup>

Coleridge, on the other hand, was the first English critic to say that Shakespeare was a great philosophical poet. In his analysis of Shakespeare's poems he showed that in them "the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a ware embrace".<sup>18</sup> "At length in the DRAMA they were reconciled". Coleridge expressed these opinions about Shakespeare's plays after the general opinion he had given about all poetry. He had said: "No man was even yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher". What Coleridge means by these



words is that great poetry always contains a significant vision of life. He found such a vision or "philosophy" in Shakespeare's plays. However, Coleridge himself did not expound or elaborate Shakespeare's vision.

Leaving aside the German criticism of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century (as most of it was mere pedantry) we come to Dowden who tried to relate Shakespeare's plays to his life and experience. In Hamlet, for example, he found the dramatisation of a conflict between Reason and Passion. According to him, this was a tragic conflict. In King Lear, Dowden found stoical ethics. The essence of the moral vision in this great tragedy is: "Men must endure..." Human life is viewed in the play from "an extra-mundane point of view". Dowden found King Lear to be Shakespeare's greatest work, as magnificent as a Gothic Cathedral. Thus it is Dowden who most clearly elaborated Shakespeare's vision of life till Bradley completed his work and brought to light the significance of Shakespeare's great tragedies.

Before returning to the question of the anachronism of Bradley's views, it is necessary to point out that his earliest interest was in Shakespearian drama. There is no doubt that he was a student of philosophy before he started to teach literature at Liverpool.<sup>19</sup> However, as Katharine Cooke points out, the literary instinct in Bradley was anterior to his interest in philosophy. In a letter to Gilbert Murray, he wrote: "I was wise about poetry long before I ever read a word of philosophy".<sup>20</sup>

In the light of what Bradley himself has said about his interest in poetry and Shakespeare, it would be wrong to suggest that he borrowed ideas from nineteenth century philosophy and imposed them on Shakespearian tragedy. In this

connection a passage from his lecture on the Ideals of Religion may be relevant. Here Bradley is talking about the paradoxical nature of man. Man is torn between material and spiritual needs. Bradley says about mankind:

Its first demand is for warmth and milk,  
and its last is for the kingdom of God. And  
it is one and the same will that wants each.  
Can there be a more astounding miracle than  
that, or a creation more contradictory than  
man, who being a pin-point desires, and is  
not his true self unless he desires, to be God.<sup>21</sup>

This passage expresses Bradley's own view of life and of human nature. It is very close to the essence of Shakespearian tragedy since these tragic plays also express a paradoxical view of man and his nature. This passage shows that Bradley's own philosophy of life was derived from Shakespeare. It was not Bradley who imposed a nineteenth century philosophy on Shakespeare; It was Shakespeare who gave to Bradley some understanding of life. Arthur Eastman is, therefore, far from truth when he says that Bradley's view of Shakespearian tragedy was anachronistic.

As we have already seen, Eastman thinks that Bradley's conception of Shakespearian tragedy is very close to the nineteenth century philosophy of "creative evolution". Here, too, Eastman is wrong. As a matter of fact, apart from his his own objective analysis of Shakespearian tragedy, Bradley has made use of the ideas of two thinkers: Aristotle and Hegel. The German romantic critics and philosophers had taken a keen interest in Greek tragedy and Aristotle's Poetics since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The German philosopher Hegel had developed his own theory of tragedy. Bradley made use of both. He borrowed Aristotle's idea of hamartia and his conception of the tragic hero because he

found them also present in Shakespeare. He borrowed from Hegel his theory of reconciliation but did not use it in the first chapter perhaps because he did not find the element of reconciliation to be present in all the major tragedies. He found it most prominent in King Lear, so he discussed it in his lectures on that play. The concept of tragic waste cannot be traced to any particular source. It was here perhaps that he was encouraged to give expression to his late Victorian, post-Darwinian sensibility. It is, however, necessary to discuss the contents of the first chapter in some detail at this stage to be able to see that Bradley's criticism of Hamlet and King Lear is not merely character-oriented but conditioned by his philosophical conception of Shakespearian tragedy.

## II

Bradley seeks to find out the common substance of the great tragedies of Shakespeare. He has chosen only four plays; Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. He thinks that these plays represent the substance of Shakespearian tragedy in an ideal form while the other tragedies are, for various reasons, only approximation to that ideal. Romeo and Juliet is supposed to be an early and immature work and therefore excluded. Richard II, Richard III, Julius Ceasar, Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus are regarded by Bradley as too deeply rooted in their respective historical records. Shakespeare did not have a free hand while writing them. Shakespeare's imagination was not free to re-shape the material of these plays. Titus Andronicus and Timon of Athens are thought partly unshakespearian and immature.

Bradley begins by asking the question: What is the

nature of the tragic aspect of life as represented by Shakespeare ? According to him, Shakespeare did not have any conscious theory of tragedy. In this respect, he was different from Ben Jonson and the French dramatist Corneille.

Bradley proceeds inductively and tries to analyse the fact of Shakespeare's tragedies without any preconception. He begins from the outside and notes that one of the chief characteristics of Shakespearian tragedy is that it brings before us a considerable number of persons though the tragic story is primarily concerned with one person. In a Shakespearian tragedy the death of the hero is an essential ingredient. The tragedy also depicts the troubled part of the hero's life which leads up to his death. "It is infact essentially a tale of suffering and calamity conducting to death" (ST,p.7) . The suffering and calamity are exceptional, of a striking kind,"unexpected and contrasted with previous happiness or glory" (ST,p.8) .

Bradley then examines the mediaeval conception of tragedy as found in Dante or Chaucer. According to the medieval conception, a tragedy is the story of a total reversal of fortune coming unexpectedly upon a man who was till then happy and secure. The purpose of these tragedies was to frighten men and impress them about the futility of earthly existence. According to Bredley, Shakespeare's idea of tragedy was larger than the mediaeval one though it did not exclude it.

The fact that the hero of a Shakespearian tragedy is a man of high degree is an essential part of the tragic effect. The conception of the tragic hero as man of high degree is obviously borrowed by Bradley from Aristotle. There are three reasons why Bradley considers the suffering and death of a great man to be important.

- (a) the fall of a great man from prosperity to adversity produces a sense of contrast;
- (b) it produces a sense of powerlessness of man;
- (c) it also produces a sense of the omnipotence of fortune or Fate "which no tale of private life can possibly rival".

Bradley defines a Shakespearian tragedy as "a story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man in high state" (ST, p.11). In this definition there are three elements:

- (a) calamity;
- (b) death; and
- (c) a man in high state.

He now adds one more dimension to his definition. Mere suffering is not tragic. The most outstanding example of suffering is that of Job in the Old Testament of the Bible. Job's story, however, is not tragic. In a tragedy the sufferer must be an active agent, and his suffering should appear to proceed at least partly from his actions. "The calamities of the tragedy", says Bradley "do not simply happen, nor are they sent; they proceed mainly from action, and those the actions of men" (p.11). The actions in a tragedy are interconnected and there is an inevitable sequence in them leading ultimately to the catastrophe. Bradley lays stress on the fact that the tragic deeds of characters are responsible deeds, that is, deeds for which the agent is entirely responsible. Thus, "the centre of the tragedy, therefore, may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from character or in character issuing in action" (p.12).

At this stage Bradley wants to remove a possible misunderstanding. Shakespeare's interest is not psychological

but dramatic. This point is important because Bradley is generally accused of excessively psychologising Shakespearian tragedy. The fact of the matter is that Bradley has tried to remove attention away from the psychology of the protagonist and fix it on the moral or philosophical design of the tragedy. Apart from drawing attention away from psychology, Bradley has also pointed out that mere plot is equally not the centre of attention. As a matter of fact, in a Shakespearian tragedy there is a perfect balance between character and plot. If anyone of these elements is more important, it is character. Bradley thinks that the dictum "character is destiny" is no doubt an exaggeration "but it is the exaggeration of a vital truth" (p.13).

Character is central to Shakespearian tragedy, yet there are three other factors that must be taken into account and that to some extent diminish the importance of character. These three elements are:

- (a) abnormal states of mind;
- (b) the supernatural;
- (c) chance or accident.

Bradley shows the importance of these elements and points out that none of them is ultimately responsible for the catastrophe. The ultimate source of the catastrophe is, in the final analysis, character and character alone. He makes it clear in the following words:

"thus it appears that these three elements in the action are subordinate, while the dominant factor consists in deeds which issue from character"(p.16).

According to Bradley action in a Shakespearian tragedy

is always in the form of a conflict. At one level, the conflict is between two external and mutually opposed forces. At another level, however, there is also a conflict in the mind of the main character. This internal conflict is more important in the mature tragedies. Bradley again points out that the conflict in a Shakespearian tragedy is a conflict between spiritual forces. In the words of Bradley: " The notion of tragedy as a conflict emphasises the fact that action is the centre of the story, while the concentration of interest, in the greater plays on the inward struggle emphasises the fact that this action is essentially the expression of character" (p.19) .

Bradley now turns to a consideration of the common qualities of Shakespeare's tragic figures:

- (a) They are exceptional beings not in the sense that they are different from the common run of humanity. The qualities they possess are not unusual but they possess these common qualities in a very intense form.
- (b) They have a marked onesidedness of disposition-"a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion or habit of mind" (p.20) . In two cases Shakespeare gives even to deliberately evil characters tragic proportions. The tragic hero of Shakespeare is not necessarily 'good' though generally he is 'good' and wins our sympathy in his errors. He possesses enough greatness to reveal the possibilities of human nature. Bradley makes here a very important point. Unlike some modern tragedies the net effect of the story of the suffering and death of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is never depressing. Bradley puts it in the following words:

" no one ever closes the book with the feeling that man is poor mean creature. He may be wretched and he may be awful, but he is not small...The most confirmed of cynics ceases to be cynic while he reads these plays" (p.23) .

According to Aristotle there are two specifically tragic emotions-pity and fear. Bradley makes an important point when he suggests that at least in Shakespearian tragedy two other kinds of feelings may be described as tragic- the feeling of sadness and that of a sense of mystery. The feeling of sadness is produced because Shakespearian tragedy leaves us with a powerful impression of waste. This sense of waste also produces the feeling of mystery. Bradley elaborates his point in the following manner.

When we come to the end of a Shakespearian tragedy, we experience a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, we see an extraordinary spectacle of human nobility and grandeur. In Macbeth, we see a superb imagination combined with an exquisite moral sensibility. In Hamlet, we find a wide-ranging intellect and an extra-ordinary keen ethical sensitivity. This greatness of soul, however, in Shakespeare's tragic heroes is co-present with a fatal weakness, and what is more unfortunate, this fatal weakness brings about the destruction of the excellence and nobility possessed by the protagonist. This leaves us with a sense of waste which in turn produces a profound sense of sadness and mystery. Bradley goes beyond Shakespearian tragedy to point out that the impression of wastefulness is a symbolic way of suggesting the wastefulness present in the entire universe. In Bradley's own words: "We seem to have before us a type of the mystery of the whole world, the tragic fact which extends far beyond the limits of tragedy" (p.23) . It is here that Bradley becomes his own contemporary and gives expression to the Victorian ethos of agnosticism. Let us first of all quote his words in full:



"Everywhere from the crushed rocks beneath our feet to the soul of man, we see power, intelligence, life and glory, which astound us and seem to call for our worship. And everywhere we see them perishing, devouring one another and destroying themselves, often with dreadful pain as though they came into being for no other end" (p.23).

Here Bradley finds in Shakespearian tragedy a reflection of the disturbed soul of his own age. The above could have been written only by a man living in a post-Darwinian age, an age which visualised the universe as entirely hostile to all that is great in human nature.

In the fourth section of his lecture, Bradley raises an important question: What is the nature of the ultimate power in Shakespeare's tragic world? At first he answers it negatively by suggesting that the ultimate power in Shakespeare cannot be conceived in religious terms. Shakespearian drama is wholly secular. He has not allowed his religious beliefs, whatever they might have been, into his work. Positively speaking, there are two facts about Shakespeare's tragic world which are incontrovertibly present there.

- (i) Shakespeare's tragic facts arouse our pity, fear and produce a sense of mystery.
- (ii) Shakespeare's tragic fact is not depressing.

Now from the first, we derive the idea that the ultimate power in Shakespeare's world is not a moral order. Had it been so, there would be no fear or sense of mystery because the catastrophe would then be regarded as just punishment for the violation of moral order. From the second it follows that the ultimate power in Shakespeare's world is not fate either. Had it been so, we would have felt depressed,

crushed and rebellious - which is not true. Bradley, however, believes that both the ideas are present in Shakespeare's plays. They are based on the isolation of single aspects of the tragic fact. If we isolate the aspect of action and concentrate on it, we get moral order as the ultimate power. Concentration on action means highlighting the unbroken chain of character-will-deed-catastrophe. It means that the catastrophe is caused by deed which is an expression of the will expressing the protagonist's character. If we isolate the aspect of suffering and concentrate on it, we get the conception of fate. By concentrating on chance, accident, force of external circumstances, character losing control over himself etc, we get the conception of fate.

Both these aspects are self contradictory and, yet both are present in Shakespeare's tragic world. The correct view would be to combine both into a unity. Before showing how the two contradictory aspects can be combined, Bradley wants to collect evidence separately for both of them. So far as the idea of fatality is concerned, Bradley says that we would not be wrong if we receive the impression from the play that the hero is a doomed man. The question is what are the sources of this impression ?

- (i) The powers that work in a character seem to be beyond his control. The character intends one way but actually ends up doing its opposite. Hamlet recoils from revenge because it is too violent for him, and yet ends up killing more people than he ever wanted.
- (ii) There is also an element of chance in the plays. The insignificant delay which cost Cordelia's life is a good example.

- (iii) It is also a matter of chance that the hero of a Shakespearian tragedy has to face a problem for which he is least fitted.
- (iv) The tragic heroes are no doubt responsible for their actions but these actions proceed from certain propensities over which they have no control. Romeo and Antony suffer because of their passion. Coriolanus suffers because of pride. The question, however, is that passions as strong as those of Romeo, Antony and Coriolanus are so vehement that the characters are helpless before them. This creates a sense of fatality.

Bradley then considers the kinds of fatalism which are not present in Shakespeare. They are as follows:

- (i) We do not find any crude or primitive conception of fate in Shakespeare.
- (ii) We do not get the impression that every thing is predetermined.
- (iii) We do not get a conception of fate according to which the supreme power of the universe seems to have a spite against some particular family or individual.

Fate in Shakespeare, according to Bradley, is a mythological conception of a huge impersonal order which controls individual life in its predetermined manner. It is a design based on necessity and indifferent to individual wishes and desires. What is the best term for this necessitarian order? Fate or something else? Bradley thinks that the idea of fate comes to our mind because of our knowledge of Greek tragedy. This idea never occurs to us while we are actually reading a Shakespearian play: Wordsworth's lines: "poor humanity's afflicted will/Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny",

do not represent Bradley's imaginative impression of Shakespearian tragedy. Bradley, however, has no fixed opinion on the subject. Fate or whatever else we may call it, is not blank necessity indifferent to good and evil. It is so because the sense of fate is combined with an entirely opposite conception-that of moral order. Bradley concludes that necessity in Shakespearian tragedy is not blank necessity but moral necessity.

Now Bradley turns away from the idea of fate to that of moral order. He agrees with the suggestion that it is possible to discover a moral order as the central scheme of Shakespearian tragedy. He briefly states the argument in favour of moral order in the following manner.

There is a necessary relationship between action and catastrophe. Action is the central fact in Shakespearian tragedy. The critical action is wrong or bad. The catastrophe is causally related to this critical action. The necessary relationship between action and catastrophe is an example of justice. The order which brings this about is therefore a just order: In spite of fear and pity, we acquiesce in the tragedy because our sense of justice is satisfied. This was Bradley's elaboration of the argument in favour of moral order. The justice we find in Shakespear is, however, not poetic justice. No doubt "the doer must suffer", and villains do not prosper at the end but suffering and happiness are not in proportion to merit. Bradley goes further and comes close to rejecting the idea of justice itself. Lear's suffering and death are not proportionate to his actions and therefore unjust. The idea of justice, according to Bradley, obscures the tragic fact. Bradley goes even further and says that the idea of justice is alien to Shakespearian tragedy even in the

case of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and Richard III. While witnessing a tragedy, we experience a variety of emotions but we never judge the characters. What actually happens is that we introduce everyday legal and moral notions into the world of tragedy where infact they are irrelevant. We actually feel the tragedy to be pitious, dreadful, awful and mysterious but we never pass sentence on the agents, and we never ask whether the ultimate power is just towards them.

After rejecting the idea of justice and merit, Bradley comes more closely to examine the nature of the moral order in Shakespeare's tragedies. The ultimate power or order is no doubt moral. It means that this power or order is not indifferent to good and evil. As a matter of fact this moral order "is akin to good and alien from evil".

The source of convulsion in a Shakespearian tragedy is never good but always evil. The evil which brings about convulsion is always pure moral evil. It is not even mere imperfection. Not only is plain moral evil alien from the ultimate power but moral imperfection also contributes to the catastrophe, and therefore it also is alien from the ultimate power. Evil destroys not only others but is self-destructive as well. It is purely negative. When evil is finally destroyed at the end of the tragedy, what remains, though it may not be as brilliant as the evil which was destroyed, is yet morally good. Bradley concludes that if existence in an order depends on good then the order must be good.

Now Bradley seeks to reconcile the concept of moral order and that of fate. He suggests that the ultimate power in the tragic world is neither pure moral order nor blank necessity. As a matter of fact, it is a kind of necessity

which is moral in its nature. This moral necessity is hostile to evil and imperfections in all their forms. This moral necessity does not operate in accordance with poetic justice. Even the idea of justice is alien to it. The idea of fate is only an aspect of moral necessity.

Having finally presented his synthesis between moral order and moral necessity, Bradley now turns to the shortcomings of his own synthesis. A problem arises. If the moral order of Shakespearian tragedy is the ultimate power in it, why has it allowed evil to enter it at all. Either this order is not akin to good or it is not omnipotent. It is surprising that the moral order in Shakespeare should produce a Desdemona as well as an Iago. Evil does not come from outside; it is there within the moral order itself and a part of it. It will be equally wrong to say that good comes from the moral order while evil is Iago's own. Bradley finds another drawback in his synthesis. In destroying the tragic characters the moral order is also destroying itself. There is no doubt that tragic characters have imperfections, are sometimes even evil, but they also have an extraordinary amount of good in them. By destroying the characters the moral order is also destroying that good. How can then we say that moral order is akin to good? These drawbacks in Bradley's synthesis reveal an idea showing two sides which cannot be reconciled:

- (i) moral order is akin to good,
- (ii) moral order is also destructive of good.

There is however, no doubt that the moral order is animated by a passion for perfection though it also engenders evil within itself and is destructive of good also.

In spite of the fact that the concept of moral order is inadequate to explain all the facts in Shakespearian tragedy,

it is yet preferable to blank necessity. The concept of moral order or moral necessity, Bradley points out, offers no solution to the riddles of life. The question, however, is why Shakespeare should be expected to offer a solution to all the riddles of life. He was writing tragedies, not a Divine Comedy. Nor was he trying to justify the ways of God to man, like Milton. Now tragedy is by definition a work of art that leaves us with a sense of mystery. Having pointed out that Shakespearian tragedy leaves us with a sense of mystery, Bradley makes still another attempt to find in Shakespeare hints and suggestions towards a solution.

- (i) Comments on God or gods do not provide any clue to Shakespeare's meaning as they are dramatic.
- (ii) Some accidents and the element of chance give to us a faint suggestion of destiny.
- (iii) Shakespeare provides us occasionally with yet another clue to the meaning of life. Suffering is there, death is there and yet somehow the suffering and death are nothing as compared with a nobility of soul revealed by the tragic characters in their final moments of agony and pain.
- (iv) Another suggestion that emerges is that death is actually a door to freedom from the world of necessity. Death should be welcomed rather than feared.
- (v) Still another suggestion given to us at the end of Shakespearian tragedy is that the fury of conflict, the waste and suffering are all an illusion.

Having considered all the possible clues to the meaning of life that Shakespeare might have vaguely left at the end of his tragedies, Bradley comes to the conclusion that none of them offers a satisfactory solution to the sense of

mystery that we are left with at the end of a Shakespearian tragedy. Bradley's conclusion is that in the ultimate analysis Shakespearian tragedy leaves us with the impression of a world henkering after perfection but also bringing to birth an evil which it is able to overcome only by self-torture and self-waste. In this lies the essence of Shakespearian tragedy.

### III

The resume of Bradley's conception of Shakespearian Tragedy given above was intended to highlight the fact that his criticism of the four major tragedies was written from a single, unified point of view. It is contended here that his character analysis, specially the analysis of the protagonist's character, too, cannot be understood except in the context of this general framework. In our chapters on Bradley's criticism of Hamlet and King Lear we shall try to show in detail how character-analysis is in a general way subservient to Bradley's over-all conception of Shakespearian tragedy. Here, we shall briefly try to show in general terms that the charge against Bradley about the undramatic analysis of character is, if not false, at least highly exaggerated.

Bradley has been accused of misreading Shakespeare's plays as biographies of the leading characters, as histories independent of the text where they have their existence. Now there is little doubt that in some of the romantic and nineteenth century Shakespeare criticism this kind of approach to character distorted the plays to make them appear as collections of bio-graphies. Maurice Morgann's essay on Falstaff, Coleridge's



analysis of Edmund's character and parts of Hazlitt's Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, not to speak of Mary Cowden Clark's Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines, are examples of the criticism in which character is treated independently of its dramatic context. This may also partly be true of certain passages in Bradley's essay on Falstaff included in Oxford Lectures on Poetry. However, this charge is not true so far as the criticism of the four major tragedies is concerned.

Bradley, no doubt insists on the psychological coherence of characters in his Shakespearian Tragedy. This is not because he treats the plays as biographies of the heroes. Actually he does so because he regards the human element in the plays as of paramount importance. He does not treat the characters as real human beings but he does believe that the plays do create an illusion of reality. According to him, the plays do not enshrine reality but an illusion of reality which is something of an entirely different order. No opponent of character criticism can claim that Shakespeare does not seek to interest his audience in the human reality of his characters or in what befalls them during the course of the play. The starting-point, however, is not the "life" of Hamlet as he might have lived it had he been a historical personage. The focal point, according to Bradley, is Shakespeare's vision of life in which the fatal weakness of the protagonist leads him irresistably, aided by chance and vicissitude, towards catastrophe. The calamitous end evokes a sense of mystery, makes us realize what a valuable life is wasted, forces us to think how Moral Necessity leads man from character through will and deed to catastrophe. And yet the tragic spectacle makes us ask questions that cannot be satisfactorily answered. Thus it is Shakespeare's tragic vision that makes him choose one character

rather than another, place him under one set of circumstance rather than any other combination of events and enables him to communicate one kind of life-awareness rather than any other kind of the apprehension of life. Characterization, poetry, atmosphere — everything in the play is subservient to this single element, the tragic conception of life. Bradley wrote his introductory lecture on the substance of Shakespearian tragedy in order to bring into focus this central insight about Shakespeare's greatest tragic plays. His criticism of these plays cannot be appreciated without realizing that his criticism, specially his character - analysis, operates within his general philosophical framework. We have every right to disagree with Bradley and his interpretation of Shakespearian tragedy but we have no right to misrepresent his critical method and accuse him of sins he never committed.<sup>22</sup>

## NOTES : CHAPTER ONE

1. Shakespearian Tragedy (1904) is the best-known piece of Bradley's Shakespearian criticism. His criticism, however, is quite ample and extensive. Like Dowden before him, Bradley discusses Shakespeare's personality in "Shakespeare The Man" (included in Oxford Lectures on Poetry). The other subjects treated by Bradley include: Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Falstaff and Feste. Bradley also discussed "Shakespeare's Theatre and Audience". There are references to Shakespeare in lectures on other subjects. He suggests, for example, that Keats's idea of Negative Capability applies to Shakespeare more than to any other poet including Keats himself. See "The Letters of Keats", Oxford Lectures on Poetry (London, 1909), p.238.
2. See S.Viswanathan, The Shakespeare Play as Poem, (Cambridge,1980), pp.1-39. See also Kenneth Muir, "Fifty Years of Shakespearian Criticism:1900-1950", Shakespeare Survey 4 (Cambridge,1951), pp. 1-25.
3. The manifesto of the new or romantic conception of Shakespeare was contained in the following words of Coleridge: "No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher....In Shakespeare's poems the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace....At length in the DRAMA they were reconciled" (Bio graphia Literaria, Chapter XV). Quoted from the extracts in Shakespeare Criticism: A Selection, ed. D.N.Smith (Oxford,1953), p.220. Bradley's Shakespearian Tragedy may be regarded as a practical elaboration of Coleridge's idea.
4. S.L.Bethell, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (Westminster,1944), p.53. Cited in Katharine Cooke, A.C.Bradley and His Influence on Twentieth Century Shakespeare Criticism (Oxford,1972), p.1. I am greatly indebted to Cook's book in this and the concluding chapter of my dissertation. However, the main part of my dissertation — the study of Bradley's criticism of Hamlet and King Lear — is totally independent of her work. In her book she does not discuss or evaluate any specific piece of Bradley's criticism. Moreover, most of the citations in this chapter have been independently checked. My main thesis — that Bradley's criticism of Shakespeare is philosophical and not merely psychological — is also independent of Cooke's book.

5. H.B.Charlton, Shakespearian Tragedy, Clark Lectures (Cambridge, 1948), p.4.
6. Katharine Cooke, op.cit., p.8.
7. Barbara Everett, "The New King Lear", Critical Quarterly, II, 4 (1960), p.328.
8. Cited in Cooke, op. cit., p.10.
9. C. Leech, "Studies in Hamlet 1901-1955", Shakespeare Survey, 9 (1956), p.3.
10. Cooke, op. cit., p.126.
11. "Professor Bradley's Hamlet", Times Literary Supplement, 7 April 1905. Reprinted in A.B.Walkley, Drama and Life (New York, 1907), pp. 148-55. Here cited from Cooke, op. cit., p. 126.
12. See especially the concluding chapter of Cooke's book, pp. 222 - 34, which begins with the following quotation from A.B. Harbage: "the terrible thing " about Bradley's criticism "is its tremendous success".
13. See Arthur M. Eastman. A Short History of Shakespearean Criticism (New York, 1968) .
14. A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth (London:1904), p.39. Quotations are made from the 1952 reprint of the second edition. Further page references are incorporated in the text and the title abbreviated as ST.
15. R.Y. Tyrrell, "Tragedy", Academy, lxxviii (11 March 1905), pp. 229 - 31. Cited in Cooke, op. cit., p. 184.
16. Of Dramatick Poesie (1668) Quoted from the extract in Shakespeare Criticism: A Selection, edited by D. Nichol Smith (London, 1916), reprinted 1953, p.16.
17. "Preface to Shakespeare" (1765). Reprinted in Shakespeare Criticism: A Selection, op.cit., p.82.
18. See Note 3 above.
19. "Bradley was academically trained as a philosopher and his interests were always truly philosophical.." (Katharine Cooke, op. cit., p.47). Cooke has given many interesting details of Bradley's life.

20. Op. cit, p.41.
21. Ideals of Religion, Gifford Lectures. Quoted in Cooke, op. cit., p.41.
22. See the last chapter of the present dissertation for some more discussion of the objections to Bradley's character analysis.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE CRITICAL TRADITION

In the following two chapters of our study, we propose to undertake detailed examination of Bradley's criticism of the two major tragedies of Shakespear. It is important to note that Bradley who was delivering the material of his book on Shakespearian Tragedy as lectures at Oxford towards the close of the nineteenth century was not doing so in a kind of historical vacuum. His book came at a particular moment in the development of Shakespeare - criticism and stands in significant relation to the criticism of the past. No doubt, Bradley does not make extensive references to earlier and contemporary criticism of Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that he had not read or made use of the earlier criticism in his lectures. In the lectures on Hamlet, for example, there are direct references to the different theories about the nature of Hamlet's delay. This is proof enough that Bradley had read the past criticism of both the plays. His approach was not historical and scholarly, but he seems to have been profoundly aware of what others had written about Hamlet, King Lear or the other tragedies.

A brief survey of the criticism of the two plays would, therefore, serve two purposes. On the one hand, we will be able to determine Bradley's debt to earlier criticism. On the other hand, we shall be able to put Bradley's criticism in the correct historical perspective. As a matter of fact, there is not much difference between the two aims. Our main purpose is to show that Bradley's criticism of Hamlet and King Lear represents the culmination of the romantic criticism of the two plays. This is more clearly visible in the case of Hamlet. Bradley's debt to the neoclassical criticism of the play, as we shall presently

see, is not much. He ignores even Dr Johnson but enthusiastically refers to the 1736 essay on Hamlet whose author was the first critic to notice the delay of the protagonist. Bradley was generally indebted to Maurice Morgann who may be regarded as the pioneer of the character criticism of Shakespeare. In his approach to Hamlet Bradley was chiefly indebted to Coleridge (though he disagreed with the latter's interpretation of Hamlet's character) and his German contemporaries.

## I

The earliest reference to Hamlet is to be found in a manuscript note by the Cambridge scholar Gabriel Harvey. The reference is commendatory. It is obvious that Harvey is not thinking of the Ur-Hamlet which was by all accounts a crude melodrama full of sensation and horrors. Harvey's note is found in a copy of Speght's Chaucer, and it reads as follows: "the younger sort take much delight in Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis; but his Lucrece, and his tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark , have it in them to please the wiser sort"<sup>2</sup>.

The Shakespeare Allusion Book, not superseded as yet, is a useful work in that through it we can chart out the rise of Shakespeare's influence on the drama of his age. There is in its pages much evidence to show that Hamlet remained a popular play throughout the seventeenth century. Since there is no direct criticism of Hamlet at least in the first half of the seventeenth century, The Allusion Book may be of great use in discovering the areas and aspects of



the play that appealed most to Shakespeare's contemporaries and successors. We have analysed some of the echoes, imitations and allusions to Hamlet on the basis of data contained in The Shakespeare Allusion Book. Allusion to, and imitations of Hamlet may be classified as follows:

- (i) the cluster of associations focused on the supernatural (The Ghost);
- (ii) the graveyard motive and the theme of mortality;
- (iii) the motive of madness; and
- (iv) the theme of incest.

The above classification shows that a number of areas of the play had greater appeal for the contemporaries and successors of Shakespeare than others. P.S.Conklin<sup>3</sup> has laid great stress on the fact that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Hamlet was universally approached as a noble man of action and as a heroic figure, a Hamlet very unlike that of Bradley. He further suggests that the romantic transformation of Hamlet into a brooding reflective type was a pure invention of nineteenth century critics and had nothing to do with Shakespeare's intentions.

Conklin, however, does not seem to have made a careful use of The Shakespeare Allusion Book. He did not pay much attention to the numerous imitations of Hamlet in Jacobean and Caroline drama. The very fact that the graveyard motive and the theme of mortality was the second most important aspect of Hamlet to influence others shows that Hamlet did not appear to his contemporaries merely as a man of action. The poetic effect created by the soliloquies must have added depth and inwardness to the conception of Hamlet in the early seventeenth century. Both The Atheist's Tragedy and

The Revenger's Tragedy possess the kind of depth that was necessitated by a concern with sin and mortality. We may conclude by saying that Conklin's theory may not be regarded as unquestionable so far as the early seventeenth century is concerned.

There is not much separate or detailed criticism of Hamlet in the seventeenth century. References to Hamlet are found mixed up with general criticism of Shakespeare. In the beginning, the references to Hamlet are scattered and diffused. They become concentrated and unified towards the end of the century. The total number of references to Hamlet is insufficient in giving us a coherent picture of Hamlet's character. P.S. Conklin rightly remarks: "the seventeenth century Hamlet can take on a distinctness of outline only by an act of the imagination."<sup>4</sup>

On the basis of scattered references to Hamlet in the seventeenth century, we can say that Hamlet was then generally regarded as a Malcontent revenger. Here we should make a distinction between the major dramatists who echoed Hamlet and the ordinary playwrights of the day. As we have already shown, the imitations of Hamlet in plays like The Atheist's Tragedy and The Revenger's Tragedy is of the deeper themes of the play. So far as the minor works are concerned, the view of Conklin about the seventeenth century conception of Hamlet as primitive seems to be right. This Hamlet was closer to its Kydian prototype. He was also less individualised than in the eighteenth century. Conklin is also correct in thinking that "as the century progressed, Hamlet the avenger lost most of the direct Kydian association he possessed as a necessary ancestral heritage, and appeared thereafter exclusively in his Shakespearean setting" (Conklin, p. 1).

A study of the references in The Shakespeare Allusion Book reveals that in the early seventeenth century the ordinary dramatist could not make any distinction between the Kydian prototype and Shakespeare's Hamlet.<sup>5</sup>

It may briefly be mentioned here that D.J.McGinn, another authority on the contemporary influence of Hamlet on Jacobean drama,<sup>6</sup> does not seem to agree with Conklin whose main thesis is, as we have already seen, that the character of Hamlet as conceived by the romantic and nineteenth century critics (including Bradley) is a falsification of the real Shakespearian Hamlet. McGinn believes that, as a matter of fact, Shakespeare's Hamlet was (like that of Bradley) more philosophical and inwardlooking. It was this conception of Hamlet that impressed itself on Shakespeare's contemporaries. McGinn writes: "Hamlet as a reflection of Shakespeare's genius, rather than as a representative of the traditional tragedy of revenge, captivated the interest of contemporary playwrights" (McGinn, p.126). This is no place to discuss the merits of the case — whether McGinn or Conklin is right. McGinn seems to be nearer the truth so far as the influence on the major contemporary dramatists is concerned. Conklin may be right about the theatrical tradition after the Restoration: the Hamlet as presented by Betterton may have been a noble man of action. However, to argue from this that the original Hamlet, too, was a simple man of action, without the psychological complexity attributed to him by the romantic critics, is, to say the least, highly controversial.

We are not writing here a history of Hamlet criticism: our only intention is to highlight those aspects of the pre-Bradleian criticism of Hamlet which might have directly or indirectly influenced Bradley's conception of the plays.

Another aim is to discover traces of the kind of philosophical and psychological approach in earlier criticism, specially before Coleridge, which is so characteristic of Bradley. The discussion of the various theories of Hamlet's delay in Shakespearian Tragedy (pp.95 - 108) and the reference to the 1736 anonymous essay on Hamlet (previously attributed to Sir Thomas Hanmer) show that Bradley had made a very careful study of the early criticism of Hamlet. It would not, therefore, be out of place to make a brief reference to the chief landmarks in the history of Hamlet criticism before Bradley.

The references to Hamlet, from the middle of the seventeenth century up to the publication in 1765 of Johnson's Preface, are conditioned by a number of factors. The most important of these elements is the general neo-classical framework which shaped the critical thinking of the period. There is not much character criticism in this period as the neo-classical critics were generally concerned with formal aspects, theories of decorum and the doctrine of poetic justice. This position is contrary to that of Bradley for whom character was the chief centre of interest. As we have already seen in chapter I, character was important for Bradley because, according to him, tragedy lies in character issuing in action. In the neo-classical period, there was not much interest in individual psychology. On the other hand, formal characteristics such as the unities, purity of genre (keeping tragedy separate from comedy), and decorum of language and characterization were generally emphasised. At the same time, the neo-classical critics did not have any philosophical conception of the contents of tragedy. They would have been surprised by phrases such as "the substance of Shakespearean tragedy", "the tragic aspect of life", or "Shakespeare's conception of the tragic fact of life". The neo-classical idea of tragedy was purely

didactic. The neo-classical critics believed that the highest goal of tragedy was to show that virtue is always rewarded and vice punished. The seventeenth and early eighteenth century critics either praise or blame Shakespeare in terms of poetic justice. They had no other conception of the inner meaning and significance of tragedy.

Another general characteristic of the period that may be briefly mentioned is the fact that most of the comments on Hamlet seem to be based on the critics experience of the play in the theatre. Hamlet does not appear to have been examined in the study. At the same time, the character of the protagonist does not appear to have engaged the attention of the critics till 1770. In his book on the history of Hamlet criticism, Conklin has deplored the lack of interest in Hamlet's character before 1770.<sup>7</sup> We can confirm his opinion by referring to one of the earliest exclusive studies of Hamlet: Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet (1736). In his note on Hamlet, Dr Johnson does not say much about Hamlet's character; his comments on Polonius are much more extensive and remarkable. We can, therefore, agree with Conklin in his view that there is none or little character criticism before 1770.

With the above generalisations in mind we can now turn to some of the individual critics to see if we can discover in them any anticipations of the Bradleian method of character analysis.

In a manuscript note (1655), Abraham Wright<sup>9</sup> expressed his opinion that Hamlet was "but an indifferent play, the lines but meane". He thought that the mad Hamlet was a good theatrical part. According to him, the scene between Hamlet and the grave-diggers, too, was good. It is clear that in

this earliest comment, the author is writing about his theatrical experience of the play. The above has been quoted to show that the neo-classical framework had not as yet become common. From this and from similar other comments from the seventeenth century we cannot infer whether the critic was impressed by the psychological complexity of Hamlet's character or by his heroic qualities.

James Drake<sup>10</sup> (1699) is the first commentator on Hamlet in the seventeenth century who approached the play from the neo-classical point of view. He praises Hamlet for a reason which would have been disapproved of by Bradley: he likes its scheme of poetic justice. According to him no play in antiquity can rival the plot of Hamlet for the admirable distribution of poetic justice. "The criminals are not only brought to execution, but they are taken in their own toils" (Vickers, p.95). We remember that according to Bradley (as in Aristotle's Poetics) the suffering of the protagonist is disproportionate to his tragic error. Bradley categorically states that there is no poetic justice in Shakespearean tragedy.

Leaving aside minor comment and critiques we come to Richard Steele,<sup>11</sup> one of the main representatives of Augustan neo-classicism. Surprisingly, however, we find that Steele's essay contains the germ of one of the most important ideas in Bradley's analysis of Hamlet's character. According to Bradley, the most important element in Hamlet's character is his deep melancholy at the thought of his mother's hasty marriage. We find the same idea in Steele's essay though he does not say that Hamlet's melancholy was the cause of his tragedy. Thus, we find even as early as 1709 a concern with Hamlet's state of mind. This interest

in the inner working of Hamlet's mind increases as the century advances and comes close to the beginning of the romantic movement. Incidentally, the comment by Sir Richard Steele disproves the thesis of P.S.Conklin, referred to above, that the general conception of Hamlet's character upto 1770 remained that of a heroic man of action without psychological complexity.

We can see the faint beginning of the idea that the character of Hamlet is central to the play in the brief reference to Hamlet in the Earl of Shaftesbury's Characteristics<sup>12</sup> "It may be properly said of this play, if I mistake not, that it has only ONE character or Principal Part" (Vickers, p.264). This idea, too, was greatly developed in the late eighteenth century. As a result of this, the romantic and the nineteenth century critics came to regard the character of Hamlet to be the only thing worthy of attention in the play. In the criticism of Bradley the idea of the centrality of Hamlet's character becomes crucial. In the very beginning of his lecture on Hamlet Bradley says: "the whole story turns upon the peculiar character of the hero" (ST,p.89).

Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet<sup>13</sup> is the next important document in the history of Hamlet criticism. It was published anonymously in 1736, and was earlier attributed to Sir Thomas Hanmer. Bradley quotes from Some Remarks in his lecture on Hamlet (ST,p.91). He refers to the author of Some Remarks as the first critic to have noticed that the character of Hamlet was of special interest. We have already noticed that this is not correct. Shaftesbury had already stressed the centrality of Hamlet's character. Steele had shown some interest in the state of Hamlet's mind.

Perhaps Bradley did not have access to the comments of Steele and Shaftesbury. In a footnote on p.92 of ST Bradley tells us that he had read the earlier criticism of Hamlet in the second volume of Furness's New Variorum edition of the play (1877). Bradley rightly gives credit to the author of Some Remarks for having noticed the fact of delay in Hamlet. However, as Bradley points out (p.91), the author could not find anything interesting in the fact of delay. The recognition of the fact was, nevertheless, important in itself. The later critics, beginning with Johnson, were soon going to base various psychological theories of Hamlet's character on the fact of Hamlet's delay in taking revenge.

Dr Johnson (1765) does not specifically refer to Hamlet's delay but he is the first critic to have pointed out that Hamlet remains passive throughout the play. According to Johnson, "Hamlet is, through the whole play, rather an instrument than an agent."<sup>15</sup> This remark has been quoted by Bradley. He comments: "It does not occur to Johnson that this peculiar circumstance can be anything but a defect in Shakespeare's management of the plot". (ST, p.91) On the eighteenth century critics in general and on Johnson in particular, Bradley comments: "Seeing they saw not" (p.91). What Bradley means by this pithy comment is that though the pre-romantic critics did notice the fact of Hamlet's delay, they did not find anything of psychological interest in it.

The criticism of Henry Mackenzie, the author of the sentimental novel, The Man of Feeling, may be regarded as a turning point in the history of Hamlet appreciation. It can be said that Bradley's conception of the character of Hamlet was a development of Mackenzie's view of the hero's



personality. Mackenzie has been regarded as a precursor of romanticism. It would, therefore, be proper first to discuss the general qualities of the romantic approach to Hamlet and the character of its hero. These qualities are found in most of the romantic and the late nineteenth century criticism of Hamlet.

1. The historical background of the play is entirely ignored. The relationship between Hamlet and the revenge plays of the Elizabethan-Jacobean period is totally forgotten. The critics from Coleridge to Bradley took very little interest in Hamlet as an Elizabethan tragedy.
2. The personality of the hero became the chief focus of attention. The neo-classical concern with the plot was replaced by interest in character.
3. The great majority of critics were fascinated by the indescribable charm of the hero's personality.
4. The fact of delay was noticed by all the critics.
5. They tried to find all kinds of explanations for the delay. It led to keen interest in psychology. Hidden motives were found for the delay.
6. There was now a keen interest in, and appreciation for, Shakespeare's language and poetry.
7. The characters in the play, including the character of Hamlet were sometimes approached historically — as if these characters were not fictions but real as we shall see in the next chapter, Bradley is not totally free from this tendency.
8. An element of mystery was discovered in the play as well

as in the character of its protagonist.

As in this section we are concerned only with the general and significant characteristics of pre-Bradleian criticism, we shall confine ourselves only to two or three critics. These critics are important in relation to Bradley.

The romantic — Bradleian conception of Hamlet may be said to have begun with Henry Mackenzie. He wrote two essays in The Mirror (April 18 and 25, 1780),<sup>16</sup> a late eighteenth century periodical. In these essays Mackenzie gave a firm direction to Hamlet criticism. In his critique of Hamlet (1773), Steevens had tried to prove that the protagonist was cruel by nature. Mackenzie presented Hamlet as a man with an extreme sensibility of mind. Mackenzie's view of Hamlet's character is very close to that of Bradley in one important respect. Like Bradley, Mackenzie believed that under different circumstances Hamlet would have been an extremely successful man. Thus according to him, as according to Bradley, the cause of Hamlet's failure and tragedy was a combination of character and circumstance. This, as we have seen in Chapter I, is the essence or substance of Shakespearian tragedy according to Bradley.

Mackenzie's essays were extremely influential. We can say that in these essays the 'new' or romantic Hamlet was born: the romantic critics — Goethe, Coleridge and Schlegel — took up this Hamlet and varied it according to their own subjective conceptions. The idea that Hamlet possessed "an extreme sensibility of mind" is the key to an understanding of the romantic — Bradleian conception of Hamlet.

The German romantic critics,<sup>17</sup> as every student of the history of Shakespeare criticism knows, did a lot to

reveal the greatness of Shakespeare as poet and dramatist. These critics also popularised the new conception of Hamlet. Lessing compared the Ghost in Hamlet with the supernatural in the plays of Voltaire. He showed that the Ghost in Hamlet was poetically conceived and was truly mysterious. Goethe stressed the extreme sensitivity of the mind of Hamlet. He presented him as a weakling, too fragile for the harsh realities of this world. A.W. Schlegel presented Hamlet as a tragedy of thought. Hamlet is lost in intellectual labyrinths and is therefore unable to cope with reality.

When we return to English romantic criticism of Hamlet we find Coleridge<sup>18</sup> echoing the ideas of A.W. Schlegel. It is difficult to say if Coleridge, directly borrowed critical ideas from Schlegel or arrived at them independently. Whatever the case, there is a remarkable resemblance between the critical perception of Coleridge and those of A.W. Schlegel. Like Schlegel, Coleridge too believes that the portrayal of Hamlet's mentality is the heart of the play. Hamlet is a character who has lost the balance between the real and the imaginary. The world of ideas and images is more real for Hamlet than the world of reality. Hamlet is placed under circumstances in which he has to act quickly and without deliberation. There is no doubt that Hamlet is brave and careless of death. Owing, however, to the predominance of intellect over will Hamlet vacillates between action and inaction, and this procrastination is fatal. Hamlet loses the power of action in the energy of resolve. Thus, Hamlet is totally opposed to Macbeth who is a true man of action. Hamlet, on the other hand, delays action till action is of no use. In his character Shakespeare has embodied an important moral

truth: action is the chief end of existence.

As we shall see in Chapter III, Bradley rejects the Schlegel - Coleridge theory of Hamlet's delay and character. A knowledge of Coleridge's theory, however, is important because it indirectly influenced Bradley's thinking about the play. As we have already seen, Mackenzie was the real pioneer of the romantic view of Hamlet. Nevertheless, it is in the pages of Coleridge that the "new" Hamlet really comes to life. Coleridge gave indisputable centrality to Hamlet's mind in the play. Hamlet is no more a noble man of action as, according to Conklin, he was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He was now come to possess a keen philosophical consciousness. Coleridge finds a reflection of his own personality in Hamlet: "I have a smack of Hamlet myself". Though Bradley rejects Coleridge's theory of Hamlet's delay, he does not deny the more important truth that Hamlet the play is about the protagonist's state of mind. The main difference between Coleridge and Bradley lies in the fact that Bradley analysis Hamlet's state of mind in a different manner.

Many critics wrote about Hamlet in the nineteenth century but their criticisms are not important from our point of view since in most of the essays on Hamlet we find only an echo of Coleridge. Hazlitt<sup>19</sup> for example, finds Hamlet to be a character not marked by the strength of will. He bears testimony to the great popularity of the play in the romantic age when he says: "We have been so used to this tragedy that we hardly know how to criticise it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces" (New Variorum Hamlet, II, p.155). The play abounds

in striking reflections on human life. Hazlitt echoes Coleridge when he says that the character of Hamlet is marked by refinement of thought and sentiment. "Hamlet is as little of the hero as man well can be" (p.156). "He is the prince of philosophical speculators" (p.156). He is an idealistic revenger, and this idealism is the source of his tragic failure. Thus we see that in all essential respects Hazlitt's Hamlet does not radically differ from the Hamlet of Colridge's conception. Hazlitt's Hamlet is an idealist whose idea of perfect revenge cannot be translated into reality. This opinion is not different from the view of Coleridge that Hamlet is incapable of making any distinction between the imaginary and the real.

No history of Hamlet criticism after 1821 has yet been written but the extracts given in Furness's New Variorum edition of Hamlet (1877) are numerous and extensive. In this section, however, we are dealing with the main outline of the critical tradition and not with the history of Hamlet criticism. It would not, therefore, be relevant for us to comment on the views of each and every critic. The only critic whose views are important from our point of view is Dowden whose book, Shakspeare: His Mind and Art, is a landmark in the Victorian criticism of Shakespeare. Bradley has acknowledged a general debt to Dowden at the end of his lectures on King Lear.

Two of the points made by Dowden<sup>20</sup> about the play and its hero have been echoed by Bradley in a slightly modified form. The first point is concerned about the quality of the play. According to Dowden, there is about

the play a certain element of mystery that is ever suggestive "Shakespeare created it a mystery, and therefore it is for ever suggestive; for ever suggestive and never wholly explicable" (New Variorum Hamlet, II, p.187). Bradley suggests the same idea in the more matter-of-fact manner when he clearly states at the end of his second lecture that there is a religious element in the play (ST, p.174).

The second point made by Dowden is concerned with the character of Hamlet. He says, "Hamlet is not merely or chiefly intellectual; the emotional side of his character is quite as important as the intellectual; his malady is as deep-seated in his sensibilities and in his heart as it is in his brain" (p.187). This remark contains the key to an understanding of Bradley's analysis of Hamlet's character. As we shall see in the next Chapter, the real cause of Hamlet's tragic delay, according to Bradley, is his melancholy induced by the thought of his mother's behaviour. Hamlet is already emotionally disturbed when the Ghost of his father asks him to take revenge. It is very obvious that Bradley's analysis of Hamlet's delay is very close to Dowden's theory.

The history of the criticism of Hamlet is a continuing debate in which a final solution may perhaps never be found. The forbears of Bradley in this debate have been critics like Mackenzie, Schlegel, Coleridge and Dowden. It is possible that the Restoration and the early eighteenth century critics would not have agreed with Bradley but certainly some of the contemporaries of Shakespeare would have sympathised with him in his attempt to focus attention on Hamlet's state of mind — his melancholy and his deep concern with mortality.

## II

The history of the criticism of King Lear brings into a sharper focus the divergence between the neo-classical and romantic taste than that of any other play, including Hamlet. As we have seen, Hamlet had captured the imagination of Shakespeare's contemporaries and immediate successor in a remarkable manner. The only other character who did so in a comparable degree was Falstaff. The late Jacobean and Caroline periods perhaps did not find anything of great appeal in King Lear as there are few imitations and echoes of the play. The Restoration brought about a change in theatrical and dramatic taste, and this change is reflected in Nahum Tate's adaptation of King Lear (March 1681) for the Restoration stage. There cannot be a more significant criticism of the play from the neo-classical point of view than this adaptation of the play. A study of the changes introduced by Tate is a clue to the neo-classical appreciation of the play, an appreciation from which Bradley could not have learnt anything since his own attitude to the play reflects an entirely different set of assumptions about drama. In spite of the fact that Bradley's criticism of King Lear belongs to the tradition beginning with Coleridge and Lamb, it is necessary to give an account of the neo-classical tradition too since the two traditions cannot be appreciated in isolation from each other.

There are good historical reasons (including philosophical reasons) for the fact that the neo-classical

age was incapable of appreciating the elements of intense pain and suffering in King Lear. The suffering and deaths of Lear, Gloster and Cordelia are the most prominent features of Shakespeare's Lear. This element raises questions and doubts about the divine dispensation of the universe. There are sharp questions about the justice of the gods in the play. Shakespeare has presented a vision of human life in which man is no more than a bare, forked animal divested of all glory and grandeur. Cordelia's death is the most painful element in the play that was found unbearable by a critic of such independent judgment as Dr Johnson. Her suffering and death are entirely unmerited from the point of view of common ideals of morality. Shakespeare's intense tragic vision finds expression in King Lear as it does in no other of his tragedies. The Restoration and neo-classical periods were precluded from an appreciation of such spectacle of suffering due to their optimistic faith in the divine governance of the universe. The cosmic order of the Enlightenment was a perfect mechanistic order which was regulated in accordance with the universal law by the Divine ordainer. Nature was no more a mystery; it was synonymous with Law, and these laws had been discovered by the great scientist Sir Isaac Newton:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night;  
God said, "Let Newton be", and all was light.

said Alexander Pope on Newton's death. The divine dispenser of the universal scheme of things could not have devised laws that were unjust and cruel to man. It is obvious that with such a world-view in the back-ground, the contemporaries



of Locke, Decartes and Newton could not but believe that the classical precepts about poetic justice in drama were eminently reasonable. King Lear, the neo-classical critics and adapters of Shakespearian drama for the Restoration stage discovered, violates poetic justice in the most reprehensible manner. Tate, therefore, makes drastic changes in the play, reduces the element of suffering and pain, shows Lear as surviving his ordeal and marries off Cordelia to Edgar.

It is not only the Restoration concept of divine benevolence that affected the appreciation of Shakespeare; it was also the influence of French neo-classical taste that shaped the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century response to Shakespeare. The Restoration world was remarkably different from the Jacobean world. The neo-classical ideas about drama and poetry had now firmly established themselves in England. The theories of

imitation, purity of genre, decorum of characterization and language were now generally accepted. There were many changes brought about in the theatre also. In the place of the Elizabethan open-air apron stage, the Restoration had a closed-in proscenium arch stage. The stage machinery was developed. Light was introduced in the theatre. Another great change was the introduction of actresses on the stage in the place of Elizabethan boy-actors. Considerable attention was paid to the formal and symmetrical 'construction of plots. In the Restoration adaptation of The Tempest, for example, Miranda ( the woman who had never seen a man) was given a male counterpart, a man who had never seen a woman.<sup>21</sup> There were changes in the English language also, so much so that some of the most

characteristic poetic passages in Shakespeare were not now generally appreciated. It is, therefore, against this background that the Tate adaptation of King Lear should be approached.

Tate revised the play in 1681. This adaptation continued to hold the stage for more than a century. It was this adaptation that was performed (with some modifications) by Garrick in the eighteenth century. It continued till 1838 when Macready revived the original Shakespearian play.

As we have already shown, Tate's adaptation reduced the element of suffering. The reason which Tate gives is as follows:

This method necessarily threw me on making the Tale conclude in a Success to the innocent distressed Persons: Otherwise I must have incumbered the stage with dead bodies, which conduct makes many Tragedies conclude with unreasonable Jests.<sup>22</sup>

Tate gives two reasons for not leaving too many dead bodies on the stage in the final scene. In the first place the excessive suffering of the main characters and their deaths violate poetic justice. Secondly, the spectacle of violent death on the stage goes against the ideal of tragic decorum. The same neo-classical conception of decorum urged him to exclude the Fool from the play. He could not have seen, as modern critics including Bradley can, that the presence of the Fool heightens the tragic pathos in the play. Tate made many other changes in the play. According to him Lear's real and Edgar's pretended madness have "so much extravagant nature" as could not

have come "but from Shakespeare's creating fancy"  
(Vickers, p.345) .

The changes introduced by Tate were generally liked by critics in the eighteenth century. Charles Gilden, in his comments on King Lear, wrote : "The King and Cordelia ought by no means to have dy'd and therefore Mr. Tate has very justly alter'd that particular which must disgust the Reader and Audience, to have Vertue and Piety meet so unjust a Reward" (Vickers, Vol.II,p.258) . Addison, however, was an exception to this general praise of Tate's version. Significantly, he did not endorse the idea of poetic justice in tragedy. He referred to Aristotle who believed that unhappy ending was better than happy ending in a tragedy (Vickers, Vol.II, p.273) . Theobald, however, preferred Tate's version to Shakespeare's (Vickers, Vol.II, p.306) : "Virtue ought to be rewarded and vice should be punished".

Leaving aside minor critics and commentators of the eighteenth century we come to Dr Johnson who in his criticism of King Lear does not show any independence of neo-classical taste but approves of the changes introduced by Tate. He finds the following moral in the play:Crimes lead to crimes and at last terminate in ruin. "But", continues Johnson

...though this moral be incidentally enforced, Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and what is yet more strange, to the faith of the cronicles.... In the present case the public has decided. Cordelia from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and

felicity. And if my sensation could add anything to the general suffrage, I might relate that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor (Vickers, Vol. V ,p.139).

The above are memorable words and form part of the critical tradition of King Lear. In his first lecture on the Substance of Shakespearian Tragedy, we have already seen, Bradley rejects the idea of poetic justice as un-Shakespearian. The idea of poetic justice, however, survived as long as the end of the neo-classical age, and the last memorable expression of the idea is found in Johnson.

The truly romantic Lear was born, not in Coleridge, but in the pages of Lamb. In his well-known essay, On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for Stage Representation,<sup>23</sup> Lamb strongly protested against Tate's travesty of Shakespeare: "A happy ending - as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through, - the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him" (Smith, p.206). His judgment on Tate's version was forcefully destructive: "Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his followers, the showmen of the scene, to draw the mighty beast about more easily" (Smith, p.206). Lamb did his best to focus attention on the tremendous imaginative effect of the play though he was not right about its suitability for stage representation. The extraordinary

poetic richness of King Lear was highlighted by Lamb in this essay, and it is the same richness that is also stressed by Bradley. Thus, there is a continuity of critical tradition between Lamb and Bradley.

In his criticism Hazlitt<sup>24</sup> laid stress on the tragic intensity of the play. This attitude is entirely opposite to that of the neo-classical critics. According to Hazlitt, Lear is "the best of all Shakespeare's plays, for it is the one in which he was the most in earnest" (Smith, p.292). The element of intense suffering in the play impressed itself on the mind of Keats also. In his famous sonnet "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear once Again", Keats highlights the fact that reading King Lear is like burning through "the fierce dispute/Betwixt damnation and impassioned clay".

The romantic critics as a whole may be credited with having brought into focus three elements in King Lear:

- (i) the tremendous imaginative effect of the play;
- (ii) its organic nature; and
- (iii) its tragic intensity.

The organic nature of the play— its parallel plots — was stressed by A.W.Schlegel.<sup>25</sup> He was the first critic to bring the value of the sub-plot as a universalising agent in the play. Shelley, like Coleridge and Hazlitt, emphasized the imaginative aspect of the play and called it "the most perfect specimen of dramatic art existing in the world" (the New Variorum, p. 429).

The romantic appraisal of King Lear was inherited

by the Victorian critics like Dowden. Bradley acknowledges a specific debt to Dowden according to whom the play is remarkable for its stoical ethics. Dowden has many fine things to say about the play. One of his insights relates to the fact that there is a strange combination of the grotesque and the sublime in King Lear. In conclusion it may be said that the Victorian criticism of the play is a continuation of the romantic attitude towards King Lear, and that this is the starting point of Bradley's criticism.

## NOTES : CHAPTER TWO

1. The number of foot-notes and end-notes in Shakespearian Tragedy is quite large. The great majority of these notes, however, deal with subsidiary textual matters. The acknowledgement of scholarly debt is scanty. The main reason might be the fact that ST is a collection of lectures, not a scholarly work.
2. See The Shakespeare Allusion Book: A Collection of Allusions to Shakespeare from 1591 to 1700 (edited by John Munroe (London, 1932), p. 56.
3. P.S. Conklin, A History of Hamlet Criticism: 1601-1821 (London, 1957), p. 7.
4. Conklin, op.cit., p. 7.
5. This generalization is based on the echoes and imitations of Hamlet in the following works. The actual quotations, not given here, are to be found in the Shakespeare Allusion Book.
  - i) Sir Thomas Smith, Volage and Entertainment in Rushia, 1605.
  - ii) West Ward Hoe, 1607.
  - iii) Fletcher, The Woman Hater, 1607.
  - iv) Semual Rowlands, The Night Raven, 1620
  - v) Beaumont and Fletcher, Four Plays, 1608.
  - vi) Peter Wood house, The Flea, 1605.
  - vii) Alaxender Niccoles, A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving, 1615.
  - viii) Marmion, A Morall Poem, Intituled The Legend of Cupid and Psyche.
6. Donald Joseph McGinn, Shakespeare's Influence on the Drama of His Age: Studied in Hamlet' (New York, 1938) edn. of 1965.
7. Conklin, op. cit., p. 2.

8. Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (1736). Reprinted in Vickers, Vol. III, pp.40-69.
9. British Museum Add. MS. 22608. Reprinted in Shakespeare : The Critical Heritage, edited by Brian Vickers, Vol. I (London, 1974), p.29.
10. The Antient and Modern Stages Survey'd. Reprinted in Vickers, op.cit. (Vol.II), pp. 93-101.
11. Tatler, No. 106 (12 December 1709). Reprinted in Vickers, op. cit., pp.209-210.
12. Characteristics (1710). Reprinted in Vickers, op. cit., pp. 263-65.
13. Vickers, op. cit. (Vol.III), pp.40-69.
14. The Plays of Shakespeare (Vol.viii). Reprinted in Dr Johnson on Shakespeare, edited by W.K.Wimsatt, Penguin Shakespeare Library, (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 138-141.
15. Ibid., p. 141.
16. Reprinted in Vickers, op. cit. (Vol.VI), pp.272-80.
17. I have made use of the English Translation of the extracts from German critics given in Vol.II of Furness's New Variorum edition of Hamlet.
18. Coleridge on Shakespeare : A Selection, edited and arranged by Terence Hawkes, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth, 1959).
19. William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays (London, 1817). Extracts reprinted in Furness (ed.), Hamlet, A New Variorum edition, Vol.II (New York, 1877). The text used here is the Dover Books reprint of the tenth impression (New York 1963), pp. 155-57.
20. See the New Variorum Hamlet, Vol.II, pp.187-90.
21. See Brian Vickers (ed.), "Introduction", Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage: 1623-1692, (London, 1974), p.7.



22. From the Dedication in Tate's adaptation of Lear. Quoted from the extracts in Brian Vickers (ed.), op. cit., p.345.
23. First published in The Reflector (1811). Reprinted in D. Nicol Smith, op.cit., pp.190-212.
24. William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays (1817). The reference here is to the selection in D.Nichol Smith's anthology, pp. 292-94.
25. A.W.Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art (1808). Translated by J.Black (1815). The reference here is to the selection in the New Variorum edition of King Lear (1880), p.450.

CHAPTER THREE  
BRADLEY'S CRITICISM OF HAMLET

The appraisal of Bradley's criticism of Hamlet , to be undertaken in the present chapter, is based on the assumption, as stated earlier, that Bradley's approach to the play is essentially dramatic and philosophical rather than psychological or pure character-oriented. The difference between the two kinds of approaches may here be briefly stated. It may at once be clarified that the term "philosophical" is not used here in a narrow, technical sense. Literature or art may sometimes be spoken of as containing a "philosophy of life". Used thus "philosophy" refers to the artist's peculiar apprehension of life, a poetic or artistic concern with ideas or, to use a better phrase, the vision of life mediated through artistic means. It was perhaps in this sense that Coleridge used the term "philosopher" when he remarked that "No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher". It is in this sense that we sometimes speak of Wordsworth's "philosophy of Nature" or of Browning's optimistic philosophy. In the narrow, technical sense there cannot be any "philosophy" in art. Shakespeare being the greatest English poet and dramatist people generally expect him to have a meaningful vision of life. This is perhaps what Coleridge hinted at when he said that in Shakespearian drama intellectual energy and creative power were perfectly reconciled. What he meant by intellectual energy was the poet's ability to bring about an ordering of experience. It is this intellectual ordering of experience which may be called as Shakespeare's "philosophy of life".

The critic who tries to disengage and isolate the

artist's ordering of experience may therefore be said to have a "philosophical" approach to a work of art. Since Bradley's study of the four major tragedies has been made from the point of view of a single experiential scheme, Bradley may be said to have adopted as "philosophical" approach.

The term "dramatic and "psychological" are here used as opposed to, and contradicting, each other. They are not necessarily so opposed. The term "dramatic" as used to suggest that the playwright's concern with characters is subservient to the total artistic design of the play. A purely "psychological" approach to character suggests that the play-wright's concern with character is for its own sake. He is interested merely in his attempt to understand the deeper motivation and psychological make-up of the main or other characters. In a situation like this the play becomes a kind of biography of the dramatis personae. In a pure form, the play would be a dramatic failure.

A critic may be said to be a purely psychological critic when he approaches the dramatis personae as if they had their real lives outside the play and independent of the total dramatic design. The critic with a dramatic approach, on the other hand, treats characters as having no independent lives. The characters are approached as part of the total dramatic design. In the case of a tragedy, only that much of the "character" of the dramatis personae is invented as is enough to evoke the necessary tragic emotions. Some of the dramatis personae may not have a "character" at all. Bassanio, in The Merchant of Venice,

for example, does not have a "character" in the same way as Shylock. To write a character-sketch of Bassanio would make a critic undramatic in his approach. To be concerned with Hamlet's character as if he were a person in real life, to give another example, would make the critic's approach purely psychological-biographical and hence undramatic.

Our contention in what follows is that Bradley's criticism of Hamlet (as of the other tragedies) is not "psychological" in the pejorative sense. No doubt there is a good deal of psychological analysis of Hamlet's state of mind but, as we shall see, this analysis is kept within the bounds of Bradley's conception of the over-all dramatic design. Moreover, Bradley approaches Shakespearian tragedy in terms of its philosophically apprehended experiential pattern. Hence, his criticism may be regarded as philosophical in a general sense.

Bradley makes the point perfectly clear in the Preface: "The point of view taken in these lectures is explained in the Introduction. I should, of course, wish them to be read in their order and a knowledge of the first two Lectures is assumed in the remainder" (ST, p.vii). In the Introduction Bradley says: "In these lectures I propose to consider the four principal tragedies of Shakespeare from a single point of view" (p.1). The above statements make it categorically clear that what he says about the substance and construction of Shakespearian tragedy in the first two lectures is an essential part of the discussion of particular plays. The substance of the first lectures, so to say, is the substratum of the

lectures on individual plays. The two cannot be approached in isolation from each other. There is no doubt that in the Preface Bradley does say that the reader could, if he so wished, ignore the first two chapters and begin the book at page 89, that is, with the discussion of Hamlet. This concession, it appears, has been made for the convenience of the reader without suggesting that the general discussion of Shakespearian tragedy in the first chapter was dispensable. Probably Bradley was confident that the analysis of individual plays in the remaining lectures would in itself guide the reader unobtrusively towards the conclusions he himself had arrived at after years of study and thought. What we intend doing in the following sections of this chapter is to prove that his confidence was not misplaced.

## I

That Bradley's approach to Shakespearian tragedy is experiential rather than merely formal, as in the neo-classical age, is borne out by the fact that his discussion of Hamlet is preceded by his comments on Shakespeare's tragic period. The concept of Shakespeare's development through a number of periods was evolved during the Victorian age and was made popular by Dowden in his book on Shakespeare. This concept was developed as a result of the studies in the chronology of Shakespeare's works. The romantic critics had no or little idea of Shakespeare's chronology. Coleridge thought The Winter's Tale as an early

comedy and Twelfth Night as among the last plays of Shakespeare. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that sufficient internal and external evidence was gathered to enable critics to develop a reasonable chronology. Dowden used this chronology in order to form a picture of the development of Shakespeare's mind in experiential terms. Bradley follows Dowden and others in regarding Shakespeare's late middle period as tragic (1601-1608). Bradley seems to be echoing Dowden in the following words:

The existence of this distinct tragic period... has naturally helped to suggest the idea that the "man" also... was heavily burdened in spirit; that Shakespeare turned to tragedy not merely for change, or because he felt it to be the greatest form of drama and felt himself equal to it, but also because the world had come to look dark and terrible to him; and even that the railings of Thersites and the maledictions of Timon express his own contempt and hatred for mankind (ST, p.81).

In spite of what Bradley says in the words quoted above, he does not wish to apply the biographical approach to the study of Shakespearian tragedy: "Discussion of this large and different subject... is not necessary to the dramatic appreciation of any of Shakespeare's works" (p.81). Thus, Bradley is interested only in the dramatic appreciation of Shakespeare's tragedies and not in their biographical significance. However, his approach still remains experiential though the inner significance of the tragedies is not related by him to changes in Shakespeare's attitude to life. This is apparent from what he says above "certain stages and changes which may be observed within the tragic period" (p.81). Since the discussion that follows seeks to isolate certain

features of Hamlet and King Lear as tragedies, it may be found to be relevant here also.

Bradley points out that Hamlet along with Julius Caesar, belongs to the end of Shakespeare's second period rather than to his tragic period proper. These two tragedies, according to Bradley, are closer to what Schlegel called the tragedies of reflection. Both Brutus and Hamlet are "intellectual by nature and reflective by habit" (p.81). King Lear and the other late tragedies are, on the other hand, tragedies of passion. The tragic failure in Lear, Othello, Macbeth, Antony and Coriolanus may be traced to their passionate natures. Consequently, the later tragedies, including Lear are "wider and stormier than the first two" (p.82).

Another feature that distinguishes Hamlet (and Julius Caesar) from King Lear and the other late tragedies is that in the other earlier tragedies moral evil is not very pronounced: "In Hamlet, though we have a villain, he is a small one" (p.82). The murder of Hamlet's father lies outside the play. The moral evil in the late tragedies, on the other hand, "assumes shapes which inspire not mere sadness or repulsion but horror and dismay" (p.83). The conclusion arrived at by Bradley from these differences is expressed in the following words: "This prevalence of abnormal or appalling forms of evil, side by side with vehement passion, is another reason why the convulsion depicted in these tragedies seems to come from a deeper source, and to be vaster in extent, than the conflict in the two earlier plays" (p.83).

Bradley notices an important feature of the last two



tragedies — Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus — which again shows that his approach to Shakespearian drama is philosophical and experiential rather than merely formal. He notices the feeling of reconciliation at the end of Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus. As we shall see in our next chapter, Bradley finds the same feeling to be present at the end of King Lear also. The feeling of reconciliation in these plays is present along with the other tragic emotions. Coriolanus is, according to Bradley, closer to the last plays. The play marks "the transition to his latest works, in which the powers of repentance and forgiveness charm to rest the tempest raised by error and guilt" (p.85).

Not only in tragic substance but in form and style, too, Hamlet is different from King Lear and the other late tragedies. Hamlet has what Bradley regards as "a limited perfection" (p.85). In the "fullness of its eloquence", Hamlet is closer to Julius Caesar than to King Lear. "...After Hamlet this music is heard no more. It is followed by a music vaster and deeper, but not the same" (p.87). In King Lear and the other late tragedies "the more pervading effect of beauty gives place to what may almost be called explosions of sublimity and pathos" (p.88). Bradley analyses the two styles very accurately but he finds that the differences between them are not merely formal! "...The changes in form are in entire harmony with the inward changes" (p.88). Thus Bradley's approach remains experiential even in matters relating to style and versification. In all this he remains a disciple of Coleridge who always insisted on the organic nature of Shakespearian drama.

## II

In the following commentary on Bradley's criticism of Hamlet our main concern shall be to highlight the fact that Bradley's "single point of view", his main approach to the play, was philosophical and dramatic or, in a word, tragic. His analysis of scene and character was made in order to reveal the play's tragic design. Apart from this main objective, we also intend to achieve certain subsidiary goals. Shakespearian criticism, as was pointed out earlier, is a continuing debate in which final solutions may never be forthcoming. We can, however, compare different points of view by putting them in a historical perspective. We can also try to discover the factors that condition a particular point of view. Shakespearian criticism has always been rooted in contemporary climate of opinion. Why was it that most of the neo-classical critics could not appreciate the tragic suffering of Lear in aesthetic terms. Why did they want a tragedy to reveal the design of poetic justics ? Why did the romantic critics take so much interest in characters ? Why did Bradley insist so much on the impression of tragic waste made by Shakespeare's tragic plays ? Did his concept of tragic waste come to him from his post-Darwinian intellectual background ? By raising such questions we can see the connection between Shakespeare criticism and its contemporaneous background. This aspect of Bradley's criticism of a play like Hamlet is interesting in itself and shall not be ignored in our commentary. At the same time, we shall also try to relate Bradley's criticism of Hamlet (and, in the next chapter, that of King Lear

to the earlier and later criticism of the play. The following commentary, therefore, is written from more than a single point of view.

The starting point of Bradley's critique of Hamlet is his emphasis on the centrality of the protagonist's character. Bradley clearly states that the plot of the play would be regarded as extremely melodramatic and sensational if the hero had not possessed the character he actually does. The plot simply narrated would at once raise the question: "Why in the world did not Hamlet obey the Ghost at once, and so save seven of those eight lives ?" (p.89). The possibility of this question being asked suggests that "the whole story turns upon the peculiar character of the hero" (p.89). Shakespeare's main contribution to the story, says Bradley, as it was represented on the stage earlier was the peculiar character of the hero. Shakespeare gives the impression of the centrality of the hero through a number of means. On the one hand, he does not include any character in the play who would share Hamlet's central role. There is no character in the play of equal or near equal importance, no one like Iago or Lady Macbeth. There are, on the other hand, some characters in the play who serve as foils to Hamlet. These characters too serve to emphasize the centrality of Hamlet. Laertes and Fortinbras do not draw our attention to themselves.; they only point towards Hamlet. Even the contrast between Laertes and Fortinbras, on the one hand, and Hamlet, on the other, serves to bring the latter into sharper relief. Keeping these factors in view, Bradley comments:

Naturally, then, the tragedy of Hamlet with Hamlet left out has become the symbol of extreme absurdity; while the character itself has probably exerted a greater fascination, and certainly has been the subject of more discussion, than any other in the whole literature of the world (p.90).

Bradley, however, concedes that "the virtue of the play by no means wholly depends on this most subtle creation"(p.91). The stage history of the play reveals that the play was immensely popular even in the days when critics had not realized the superb subtlety of the character of the hero. Thus the popularity of the play does not entirely depend on the realization of the artistry that has gone into the making of the hero's character. Bradley now traces the history of such realization. It is a subject with which we have partly dealt in the preceding chapter. Bradley shows how Hamer, (1736) was the first to point out the fact of delay in the play. Dr Johnson followed him when he pointed out that Hamlet was throughout the play "rather an instrument than an agent". Johnson, says Bradley, only noticed the fact but did not realize its true significance. As a matter of fact, Johnson regarded it as a defect:"...It does not occur to him that this peculiar circumstance can be anything but a defect in Shakespeare's management of the plot"(p.91). It was only with the beginning of romanticism that Henry Mackenzie, the author of The Man of Feeling, realized the true significance and cause of Hamlet's delay. He discovered the fact that Hamlet's delay was rooted in his character and that the character of Hamlet was the most remarkable thing in the play.

As we have already seen in chapter two, the idea of the centrality of Hamlet's character in the play had already been noticed by critics since the end of the neo-classical age. Bradley himself noticed the fact and connected it with the beginning of romanticism in England. Bradley, however, did not try to find out why Hamlet's mentality (his state

of mind ) became the centre of interest for critics in the romantic period. We think that the phenomenon is connected with the growth of subjectivity in the romantic period. The romantic writers of the early nineteenth century were greatly interested in the sub-conscious states of the human mind. They were also interested in the impact of suffering on mind and character. Wordsworth deals with this aspect of experience in some of his poems as well as in his play, The Borders. Henry Mackenzie, who is generally regarded as precursor of romanticism, was also interested in the subjective states of the human mind. It was therefore, not surprising for him and other critics who followed him to become aware of Hamlet's mentality and how it affects his behaviour. Since Bradley belonged to the romantic tradition in criticism it was easy for him to see that Hamlet's state of mind (his character) occupied a pivotal position in the play.

Is Bradley's insistence on the centrality of Hamlet's mentality a product of his interest in the psychology of the protagonist ? Is he a critic with an unusual interest in character ? Is he, as many people think, a character-chaser who regarded characterization as an end of itself ? The answer to all these questions is in the negative. Bradley is not a mere character - critic because for him characterization in Shakespeare does not exist for its own sake. Those who accuse him of an excessive interest in character do so because they ignore the fact that the first chapter where Bradley deals with the substance of Shakespearian tragedy is crucially related to his discussion of the individual plays. As a matter of fact, Bradley is

interested in the pattern of behaviour which leads the hero towards catastrophe. The seeds of the tragic end lie hidden, according to Bradley, in the character of the protagonist. Bradley discerns this pattern in the four tragedies where Shakespeare's own imagination was totally free and his art had acquired complete control over his medium. In these four great tragedies Bradley found the same deterministic pattern in operation: Character — will — action — catastrophe. His analysis of character in Hamlet and the other tragedies is intended to reveal the essential tragic pattern which lies embedded in them. Character - analysis is not for its own sake; its aim is to bring to light the underlying tragic pattern. We may disagree with Bradley and contend that the tragic pattern does not really exist or that there is no single tragic pattern in all the four tragedies. We may even say that Bradley's tragic pattern is not a discovery but an invention — that Bradley has imposed a Victorian ethical scheme on to Shakespeare. We may say all this, but we cannot say that Bradley's character- analysis is in isolation from his philosophical - ethical approach. Bradley tries to be as objective in his analysis of facts in the text of the plays as he can because he wants to prove that his analysis is inductively arrived at and not imposed from outside. Bradley's success depends on the objectivity and validity of his analysis. The main question before us is : how much of the text bears out Bradley's conclusions ? We have to find out which parts of Hamlet's text or the play's life in the theatre is illuminated by Bradley's commentary. However, we have no intention to sit in judgement on Bradley; our main concern is to show what Bradley is attempting to do in his Shakespearian Tragedy.

Keeping the above in mind, we find that even those critics who disagree with Bradley's approach agree with him in giving centrality to Hamlet's character and his state of mind. The central fact, moreover, of Hamlet's character is his delay, and the theories of his character are in effect the theories of his delay. Before coming, however, to discuss the various typical theories, Bradley wishes to remove one misunderstanding. Bradley disagrees with the view that Hamlet is an unintelligible character or an enigma. It is sometimes suggested that in the character of Hamlet Shakespeare wished to represent a type of the mystery of life. This according to Bradley, is mere confusion of mind: "The mysteriousness of life is one thing, the psychological unintelligibility of a dramatic character is quite another; and the second does not show the first, it shows only the incapacity or folly of the dramatist" (p.93). The mystery does not lie in the psychological unintelligibility of Hamlet's character but in the realization that "strength and weakness should be so mingled in one soul, and that this soul should be doomed to such misery and apparent failure" (p.94). The statement just quoted above brings to light the relationship between psychological analysis, on the one hand, and the tragic pattern of Hamlet, on the other. Bradley implies that Shakespeare's characters are amenable to psychological analysis since one of Shakespeare's aims is to represent human life with all its dramatic verisimilitude. Shakespeare, at the same time, has a poetic conception of human destiny and this conception is tragic. There is no contradiction between the two. Verisimilitude is not the main objective but it is the essential concomitant of the over-all tragic

design. The degree of verisimilitude in Shakespearian drama, as we shall see in the last chapter, is the central questions at issue between Bradley and his opponents. So far as Shakespearian Tragedy is concerned, the fact cannot be denied that Bradley does insist on psychological consistency and Coherence of characters. Though within the over-all pattern.

The first theory that Bradley takes up is the one that suggests that Hamlet's delay was caused by external difficulties and that it was not symptomatic of any inherent quality in his character. Apart from the fact that such a view would diminish the tragic intensity of the play, it is not borne out by the evidence in the text. Bradley says that "a theory like this sounds very plausible — so long as you do not remember the text" (p.95). Bradley's reliance on, and acquaintance with, the text is really remarkable. He gives the following evidence from the text to prove that the above theory is not correct:

1. There is absolutely no reference in the text to any external difficulty.
2. Hamlet always assumes that he can obey the Ghost's injunction. That Hamlet himself is aware of the fact that there is no external difficulty is clear from IV.iv.45: "Sith I have cause and will and strength and means to do't".
3. Laertes' rebellion is intended to show that Hamlet could have done the same much more easily since the common people loved him.
4. The play-scene was arranged by Hamlet not to convince the court about Claudius' guilt. He did it in order to



convince himself that the king was really guilty.

5. Hamlet never says that he wants to bring the king to public justice as the upholders of the theory believe. His desire was for private revenge.

Bradley rejects the theory of external difficulty though he concedes that in thinking too precisely on the event Hamlet might have been considering the possibility of leaving a wounded name behind. This possibility he wants to avoid.

It may be worthwhile here to pause a little and examine briefly Bradley's critical procedure and style. Eastman in his chapter on Bradley in his History of Shakespeare Criticism<sup>1</sup> draws attention to Bradley's logical and analytical method though, according to him, this method is combined with imaginative warmth and vision. Eastman rightly points out : "No work since has so perfectly combined the enthusiasm and vision of the romantics with the common sense and exactness of the scientific method, has so perfectly fused wide philosophic outlook with grasp of detail, and synthetic power with analytic". This combination of imaginative vision and cool rational analysis become apparent by the time the reader comes to the end of the lectures on Hamlet. Earlier, however, the feeling that Bradley's analysis is not doing justice to the imaginative quality of the play is quite strong. The discussion of the various theories of Hamlet's delay is thus carried on in a logical manner which seems to ignore the fact that the subject under discussion is a great work of poetic and dramatic art. We may also get the impression that Bradley is dealing with a psychological

novel rather than a specimen of poetic drama. Such impressions, however, are not true. Bradley is as keenly aware of the imaginative quality of the plays as any other critic. His appreciation of Hamlet and the other tragedies is arrived at intuitively and imaginatively and not through mere prosaic and logical analysis. We shall return to the subject towards the close of the present chapter. The aim here was only to point out at the outset that Bradley's method and critical procedure in the discussion of the theories of Hamlet's delay are much more complex than what they appear to be.

The next theory Bradley discusses, and rejects, is the one relating to conscientious scruples against revenge. There are two forms that the theory has taken. On the one hand, it is suggested that Hamlet delays because of conscious scruples...There is no evidence in the text to support the theory in this form except a passing suggestion at V.ii.63. The passage is the only one in the play where Hamlet gives expression to doubts about the correctness of revenge. Bradley, however, rejects the theory for the following reasons:

- (i) Hamlet always assumes that he ought to take revenge.
- (ii) He never refers to moral scruples as the cause of his delay.
- (iii) The passage at V.ii.63 (ST,p.98) certainly expresses Hamlet's desire to justify revenge. However, Horatio's reply shows that Hamlet needed no justification. Moreover, the passage occurs very late in the play. Had Shakespeare intended to show moral scruples as the cause of Hamlet's

delay, he would have given indication to this effect at an earlier stage.

(iv) The Ghost, exhorting Hamlet to take revenge, has been presented sympathetically.

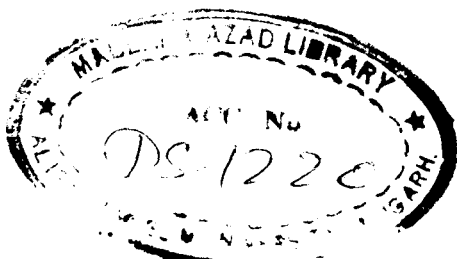
Bradley has, so it appears, rather simplified the problem of revenge in the play. For one thing, he does not take the tradition of Elizabethan revenge drama into account. Secondly, he has dismissed the theory of unconscious scruples rather too summarily. He has ignored the fact that somehow the ethics of revenge occupied a place of central importance in the play. Bernard Shaw, for example, saw the question at issue in Hamlet clearly. He remarked: "Born into the vindictive morality of Moses Hamlet has evolved into the christian perception of the futility and wickedness of revenge and punishment, founded on the simple fact that two blacks do not make a white".<sup>2</sup> The centrality of the theme of revenge in Hamlet has been brought to light by scholars and critic. Eleanor Prosser,<sup>3</sup> for example had studied in detail not only the theme of revenge in Elizabethan drama but also the attitude to revenge in the writings of Elizabethan and Jacobean moralists. She has shown that Tudor moralists and preachers never tired of condemning revenge. The dramatists were in entire agreement with moralists. The traditional code of honour, no doubt, enjoined revenge but the preachers and the dramatists were greatly inspired by the Christian stress on forgiveness. Miss Prosser has shown how dramatist after dramatist brought to light the evil consequences of personal vengeance. The subtler among the dramatists showed how revenge degenerates the revenger. Thus, in her study of Hamlet, she shows that the morality of revenge is kept in

sharp focus by Shakespeare. Bradley, on the other hand, takes it for granted that Hamlet is morally — bound to take revenge. We are not suggesting that Bradley is wrong where a scholar like Eleanor Prosser is right. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Bradley ignores Shakespeare's concern with the morality of revenge.

Bradley now takes the sentimental theory of Hamlet's character. In ~~effect~~, this theory suggests that Hamlet delayed because he was a weakling. The theory was first propounded by Goethe who used the following words for Hamlet: "a lovely, pure and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and must not cast away".

Bradley rightly condemns this view of Hamlet's character. According to him, there is nothing in the text to support such a view. Bradley, on the other hand, highlights Hamlet's manliness, harshness, brutality and cynicism. Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia, his killing of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his fight with the pirates and with Laertes in the grave, his harsh words to his mother, his participation in the fencing - Match — all go to show that Hamlet was not a sentimental weakling.

The last theory that Bradley discusses is the one propounded by Coleridge and Schlegel. According to them, Hamlet's delay is caused by the excessively reflective habit of his mind. Bradley quotes Schlegel who says: "Hamlet is a hypocrite towards himself; his far-fetched scruples are often mere pretexts to cover his want of determination. He has no firm belief in himself or in anything else".



Bradley suggests that Dowden's addition to this theory is worthy of consideration. Dowden had been in general agreement with Coleridge — Schlegel theory but he had also stressed the emotional side of Hamlet's nature. Thus Bradley found the Coleridge — Schlegel theory as supplemented by Dowden to be the closest to Shakespeare's text. Nevertheless, he rejects it for the following reasons:

- (i) Bradley thinks that the theory is closer to Coleridge's own personality than to Shakespeare's Hamlet. In Coleridge, enormous intellectual force was combined by an unusual weakness of will. This, however, is not true of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Under normal circumstances, Hamlet would have been an eminently successful man. However, in the circumstances in which we find him, his exceptional gifts become detrimental and lead him towards the catastrophe.
- (ii) Reflectiveness was not the cause of Hamlet's irresolution though it certainly added to its harmful effect.

The rejection of the Coleridge — Schlegel theory leads Bradley on to discuss his own view of Hamlet's character. He begins in the traditional manner by isolating the prominent features of Hamlet's character. The procedure may be analytic but Bradley's evaluation of the character of Hamlet is ultimately imaginative and intuitive.

The impression that Hamlet, according to Bradley, makes on us is not only that of a man of thought but also that of a man of action. He is loved by the people and, says Bradley, "the people do not love philosophers". Bradley gives many examples of Hamlet's active nature.

Though associated with the university of Wittenberg, he is not a recluse. Thus the cause of Hamlet's delay does not lie in his supposedly reflective nature but elsewhere; the seeds of danger are to be found in Hamlet's melancholic temperament.

Bradley, of course, does not use the word 'melancholic' in its modern sense. He uses it in its Elizabethan connotation. Bradley is sufficiently historical in his approach and clearly defines the Elizabethan conception of the melancholic temperament. Thus the main symptom of melancholy, according to him, is a certain nervous instability characterised by rapid changes of feeling and mood. Bradley refers to Don John, Jaques and Antonio as exemplars of melancholy. Hamlet's melancholy, however, is different from theirs. Shakespeare, according to Bradley, "gives to Hamlet a temperament which would not develop into melancholy unless under some exceptional strain, but which still involved a danger. In the play we see a danger realized, and find a melancholy quite unlike any that Shakespeare had as yet depicted, because the temperament of Hamlet is quite different" (p.110).

The next source of danger lay<sup>4</sup> in Hamlet's moral sensibility. The danger is that any great shock that life might inflict on it would be felt with extreme intensity. It can lead to tragedy.

In some excellent paragraphs Bradley delineates Hamlet's moral sensibility (pp.110-13). A great idealist, Hamlet has unbounded love for humanity and nature. The exact counterpart of his love is his hatred for evil. He hates his uncle's drunkenness, his mother's sensuality and has a passionate

aversion to falsehood and pretentiousness. Valuable in themselves, these qualities can prove to be tragic in Hamlet's special circumstances.

Another aspect of Hamlet's character highlighted by Bradley is his remarkable intellectual genius. He has an unusual quickness of perception, great agility of mind and remarkable intellectual resourcefulness. All this, however, is not a hindrance to a life of action — as Coleridge and Schlegel suggested. A speculative bent of mind does not necessarily lead to irresolution. Under different and normal circumstances Hamlet can be imagined as acting with firmness and resolution. In the situation, however, in which Hamlet finds himself these speculative gifts prove detrimental and lead him towards the catastrophe.

Having described what Bradley regards as the permanent traits of Hamlet's character, he comes to discuss the moral shock which paralyses Hamlet's will and incapacitates him for meaningful action. Bradley now gives an analysis of Hamlet's state of mind in the beginning of the play. He draws attention to the soliloquy, "Oh, that this too too solid flesh..." where Hamlet expresses his intense loathing of life. What has occasioned this utter disgust? It is neither the death of his father nor the loss of the crown. The disgust has been caused by the knowledge of his mother's true nature. This moral shock is of the utmost importance in an understanding of Hamlet's tragedy. It would have been less severe in the case of a man with a blunter moral sensibility. In Hamlet's case, however, his very gifts become his enemies. To cap it all, there comes the Ghost's revelation about adultery and murder. The numbing and paralysing effect of these experiences unhinges Hamlet's

moral sensibility, induces his dormant melancholy and is the real cause of Hamlet's delay.

In the last section of his first lecture on Hamlet, Bradley discusses Hamlet's melancholy in some detail before summing up his the tragic aspect of the play.

Melancholy is not a pathological state and may not be regarded as a disease so far as Hamlet is concerned. Anticipating to some extent the historical - minded studies of Shakespeare's tragedies by Lily B. Campbell<sup>5</sup>, Bradley remarks: "It would be absurdly unjust to call Hamlet a study of melancholy, but it contains such a study" (p.21). Referring to the nineteenth century critical theme of Hamlet's madness, Bradley suggests that the insanity is only a pretence since Hamlet does not behave like a mad man whenever he is alone or in the company of Horatio. This pretence, however, comes very close to the real thing.

Melancholy, according to Bradley, explains many facts of Hamlet's behaviour. First of all, it provides us with the real reason for Hamlet's inaction. There are no doubt, other retarding motives in Hamlet's case but they "acquire an unnatural strength because they have an ally in something far stronger than themselves the melancholic disgust and apathy" (pp. 122-23). Hamlet's doubts and hesitations are not an indication of his intellectuality " but otiose thinking hardly deserving the name of thought. They are unconscious pretexts inaction" (p.123).

Some other aspects of Hamlet's behaviour explained, according to Bradley, by Hamlet's melancholy are as follows:

- (1) The sudden changes between energetic action and lassitude



on Hamlet's part are explained by the near-pathological condition of melancholy.

(ii) Melancholy accounts for the evidently keen satisfaction that some of his action give to Hamlet. His behaviour during the play-scene and the voyage to England are actions of a man who has a momentary respite from his melancholic disgust.

(iii) This theory also explains Hamlet's sudden outbursts of pleasure at the sight of old friends and acquaintances.

(iv) It is only with the help of this theory that we can explain certain unpleasant aspects of Hamlet's behaviour — his savage irritability, his callousness and his insensibility to the fate of those whom he despises.

(v) His bursts of hysterical passion can also be understood in the light of this theory.

(vi) Most important of all, the postulate about melancholy also explains why he fails to understand the real reason of his own delay. The questions Hamlet asks himself are "the questions of a man stimulated for the moment to shake off the weight of his melancholy, and, because for the moment he is free from it, unable to understand the paralysing pressure which it exerts at other times" (p.127).

A prejudiced reader coming to this part of Bradley's lecture would immediately seize upon the word "psychological" used here (p.127) about the above explanation of Hamlet's character. Bradley says: I have dwelt thus at length on Hamlet's melancholy because, from the psychological point of view, it is the centre of the tragedy..." (p.127). The prejudiced reader would at once brand Bradley as a psychological critic, forgetting that in the very next sentence Bradley says: "The

psychological point of view is not equivalent to the tragic. The psychological, or rather pathological state of melancholy in Hamlet excites our interest only because he happens to be gifted with a speculative genius. Bradley acutely remarks that it is the connection between Hamlet's melancholy and his speculative gifts "which gives to his story its peculiar fascination and makes it appear...as the symbol of a tragic mystery inherent in human nature" (p.127). It is the imaginative, psychological and poetic aspect of the story of Hamlet's failure that has here been highlighted by Bradley. It now appears that the psychological explanation is not Bradley's objective; it is only the means by which the tragic pattern is revealed. We may quote Bradley's memorable words on the ultimate significance of Hamlet:

Whenever this mystery touches us, whenever we are forced to feel the wonder and awe of man's godlike 'apprehension' and his 'thoughts that wander through eternity', and at the same time are forced to see him powerless (it would appear) from the very divinity of his thought, we remember Hamlet (p.127).

### III

In the beginning of his second lecture, Bradley proposes to review the course of the action in the play to show that his theory of Hamlet's character can explain most of the facts in the play. There is not much of outstanding significance in this part of his lecture since Bradley's commentary on the play is in keeping with his

conception of Hamlet's character. He does not, for example, give much importance to Hamlet's doubts about the Ghost expressed in the soliloquy beginning with the words, " O what a rogue and peasant slave am I ...". Bradley regards the doubt as self-deception on his part. It is inconsistent with the earlier drift of the soliloquy. Bradley comments: "Evidently, this sudden doubt, of which there has not been the slightest trace before, is no genuine doubt; it is an unconscious fiction, an excuse for his delay — and for its continuance"(p.131). Many readers now would give much more importance to Hamlet's doubt of the Ghost since historical research in the present century has greatly increased our knowledge about Elizabethan pneumatological conceptions.<sup>6</sup> We know that the majority of the Protestant audiences in Shakespeare's day would have greatly shared Hamlet's doubts about a Ghost supposed to have come from the Purgatory. Just as in the case of the theme of revenge, here too we find Bradley to be a little less than adequately interested in the historical background of the play.

Bradley thinks that the sparing of the king in the Prayer — scene is the turning-point in the play and the cause of the deaths of six other persons besides Hamlet himself. The excuse that Hamlet offers to himself for sparing the king is, according to Bradley, another example of his self-deception. Melancholy has paralysed him and though he says, "Now might I do it", he has, according to Bradley, no effective desire to do it. Bradley continues, "...in the little sentences that follow, and the long pauses between them, the endeavour at a resolution, and the sickening return

of melancholic paralysis, however difficult a task they set to the actor, are plain enough to a reader" (p.135).

Apart from those who take a dim view of Hamlet's character, the great majority of critics agree with Bradley that the real reason of Hamlet's delay is unconscious and different from the one stated by him. However, such an interpretation is too subtle for the stage, and Bradley himself has recognised the fact. Bradley has totally ignored the fact that the heart of the scene lies in its profound irony. Hamlet spares the king because he thinks that the latter, now in a mood of repentance would go to Heaven if killed. As a matter of fact, however, the king is unable to pray because he still enjoys the ill-gotten fruits of his crime. The life of the scene is in this deliberately contrived ironical situation, and this is totally ignored by Bradley.

Bradley interprets the killing of Polonius in the light of his melancholy theory. Hamlet is capable of action in a state of excitement like any other person suffering from melancholy. He kills Polonius under the mistaken assumption that the king is hiding behind the arras. Bradley acutely notes the fact that while killing the king in the Prayer- scene would not have elicited the audience sympathy, the killing of Claudius, had Claudius been hiding in the Queen's closet, would have received full measure of sympathy from the spectators.

The last important part of Bradley's commentary concerns the change in Hamlet after his return from the Voyage to England. Hamlet now reveals a certain consciousness of power due, perhaps, to his success "in counter-mining

Claudius and blowing the courtiers to the moon" (p.143). Another change that we notice in Hamlet is that nowhere in the play now does he express his former loathing of life and world-weariness. Bradley notices that there is no soliloquy in the fifth Act. Shakespeare, perhaps, "means to show in the Hamlet of the Fifth Act a slight thinning of the dark cloud of melancholy, and means us to feel it tragic that this change comes too late" (p.144). The last change that Bradley notices in Hamlet concerns his growing faith in Providence. "There is a divinity that shaps our ends" says Hamlet. Earlier, too, there was an inkling of the working of the Providence in human affair—at the death of Polonius and perhaps at Hamlet's farewell to the king. The premonition of danger about the fencing-match is brushed aside by Hamlet with the words: "We defy angry: there is special providence in the fall of a sparrow...the readiness is all". The impression made by these changes in Hamlet, however, is one of religious resignation rather than of an active faith in Providence. This religious resignation comes from a kind of fatalism, "a kind of sad or indifferent self-abandonment" (p.145).

Highly perceptive as Bradley is in his remarks about the changes in Hamlet, there is, however, one little point that needs some attention. The note of religious resignation is sounded in the second scene of the Fifth Act; the passage about the defiance of angry and readiness being all occurs in V.ii and not in the beginning of V.i. It means that the clearest indication of the change occurs in the very last scene of the play, just before the fencing-match and the end of the tragedy. The first scene of the Fifth Act is the Grave-yard scene in which Hamlet

reveals this intense awareness of death. Now, the nihilism ("Nothing matters") which Bradley attributes to the Hamlet of the entire Fifth Act is more true of Hamlet in V.i. The Hamlet of the last scene shows an attitude of mind that is closer to acquiescence than nihilism.

Apart from his commentary on the action of the play, Bradley devotes a small section of his second lecture to a consideration of some minor features of Hamlet's character, particularly those relating to his manner of speech. Bradley was probably the first critic to note that Hamlet possessed a habit of repeating words. The practice is quite common so far as comic characters are concerned but among serious characters Hamlet is the only one in Shakespeare's plays to repeat words even when he is not agitated. It may be pointed out that Bradley only notes the trait; he does not try to discover any kind of poetic, philosophical or dramatic significance in it. However, Bradley does find some kind of relationship between the next trait which he notices and Hamlet's mentality. This trait concerns Hamlet's fondness for quibbles and Word-play. According to Bradley, the habit of punning is a reflection of the nimbleness and flexibility of Hamlet's mind. This characteristic is highly marked in Hamlet but entirely absent in Shakespeare's tragic heroes. Bradley also links it with Hamlet's (and Shakespeare's) humour. It is apparent that in noticing the above characteristics Bradley does not take the play's rhetorical mode into account. He isolates these features as typical of Hamlet's character, not of the play as a poetic unit.

The best defence of Bradley against the charge that owing to his excessive preoccupation with character he paid little attention to the dramatic design of the plays is to be found in his discussion of Hamlet's relation with Ophelia (pp.152-59). He does write about Ophelia as a character but he justifies her minor role in the play in dramatic and theatrical terms. On the questions why Hamlet seems to be so little preoccupied with Ophelia, Bradley says:

"Now Shakespeare wrote primarily for the theatre and not for students and therefore great weight should be attached to the immediate impressions made by his works. And so it seems at least possible that the explanation of Hamlet's silence may be that Shakespeare, having already a very difficult task to perform in the soliloquies... did not choose to make his task more difficult by introducing matter which would not only add to the complexity of the subject but might, from its 'sentimental' interest distract attention from the main point; while from his theatrical experience, he knew that the audience would not observe how unnatural it was that a man deeply in love, and forced not only to renounce but to wound the woman he loved, should not think of her when he was alone (p.159).

The point that Bradley makes in the above paragraph is important for an understanding of Bradley's critical approach. What he suggests here is that it is the impression that really matters in drama and not psychological consistency or verisimilitude. Shakespeare has focussed attention on the development of Hamlet's character and delineation of his various attitudes. His relationship with each and every character is not relevant to the presentation

of his tragic dilemma. Owing to this reason Shakespeare ignores to trace Hamlet — Ophelia relationship in the round and in all its aspects. Moreover, says Bradley, to have done so would have distracted the attention from the tragic theme of the play. What really matters in Hamlet is Shakespeare's apprehension of the tragic aspect of life in the Protagonist's story and not the delineation of character for its own sake.

Again, the fact that Bradley's criticism is characterised by intuitive and imaginative impressions rather than cool and rational analysis is brought into focus at the end of his lectures on Hamlet. Bradley acutely remarks that concentration on the hero's character relegates into the background an important impression made by the play. Both Claudius and Hamlet are throughout engaged in a battle for life and death but both of them are relentlessly hurled forward towards a conclusion over which they themselves have little control. Accidents in this encounter, says Bradley, are anything but accidental. The impression is quite strong that there is a Providence in the affairs of men. There are unmistakable intimations of some vaster power governing the course of human life, and it is the sense of such intimations that gives to the play a certain religious character. Psychological analysis of character, we now see, has led the reader of Bradley's Shakespearian criticism to a clear apprehension of the play's philosophical theme.



NOTES : CHAPTER THREE

1. See Note 13 to Chapter I.
2. Shaw on Shakespeare, edited with an interoduction by Edwin Wilson, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth,1969) ,p.97.
3. Eleanor Prosser, Hamlet & Revenge, second edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press,1971) .
4. We use the past tense here because Bradley, too, sometimes uses the past tense while talking about Shakespeare's characters. This habit on Bradley's part has justly been criticised. The present tense should, of course, be normally used while discussing dramatic characters.
5. Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion (Cambridge, Mass, 1930) .
6. See J.Dover Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet (Cambridge, 1935) .

CHAPTER FOUR

BRADLEY'S CRITICISM OF KING LEAR

Significantly, the starting point of Bradley's lectures on King Lear is not the character of the protagonist or any other of the major characters in the play but the general impression made on the common reader and the uncommon admirer. Bradley makes a distinction between King Lear as a stage-play and as a great imaginative masterpiece. As a work of imagination it is closer to Prometheus Bound and the Divine Comedy rather than to Shakespeare's other major tragedies. Bradley calls it a poor stage-play, echoing, as we have already seen, Lamb early in the nineteenth century. We shall discuss Bradley's reasons for regarding it as a poor stage-play a little later; here, let us point out that Lamb's opinion continued to hold sway till the beginning of the present century. The history of the appreciation of King Lear shows a gradually rising curve. The Restoration and the eighteenth century had little appreciation for the original Shakespearian version. Indeed, theatre-goers never got an opportunity to see Shakespeare's play at all till 1838 when Macready restored the original version. With the beginning of romanticism in England, however, selected readers began to appreciate Shakespeare's original King Lear in the study. Keath's sonnet on the play is typical of the period. Critics now began to make a distinction between King Lear as a work of the imagination and as a stage-play. This distinction became an orthodoxy and remained so throughout the nineteenth century. In Bradley we find the last memorable expression of the view that King Lear in the theatre does not come anywhere near to produce the kind of effect it does in the study. The main reason why such an opinion came to be held by critics as perceptive as Lamb and Bradley was that the nineteenth century theatre with its naturalistic ideology

utterly failed to do justice to a play that was written for a freer kind of theatre. The elaborate lighting and sound effects, the naturalistic scenery and acting style were utterly unsuited for the play that depends entirely for its success on symbolic and poetic effects. That this was the real reason for Bradley's failure to appreciate King Lear as a stage-play was shown by Harley Granville-Barker in his book on the play.<sup>1</sup> He gives valuable advice about the staging of the play and shows how the storm-scene could be symbolically and effectively presented on the stage. According to him, the naturalistic details distract from the significance of the storm which is more internal in the mind of Lear than external. Lear himself should be made to personify the storm. The twentieth century, thus, has rectified the mistaken impression of the unstageability of Lear that was current in the nineteenth century. King Lear is now generally regarded as the greatest work of Shakespeare's dramatic imagination. The dichotomy envisaged by Bradley and others in the nineteenth century has now been bridged and the imaginative effects are seen to be a part of the play's dramatic quality.

Bradley, however, does find the dichotomy important and worthy of critical notice. We may quote his words in full in order to see how he distinguishes between what he considers to be the two divergent qualities in the play:

When I read King Lear two impressions are left on my mind, which seem to answer roughly to two sets of facts. King Lear seems to me Shakespeare's greatest achievement, but it seems to me not his best play. And I find that I tend to consider it from two rather different points of view. When I regard it strictly as a drama, it appears to me, though in certain parts overwhelming,

decidely inferior as a whole to Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth. When I am feeling that it is greater than any of these, and the fullest revelation of Shakespeare's power, I find I am not regarding it simply as a drama, but am grouping it in my mind with works like the Prometheus Vinctus and the Divine Comedy, and even with the greatest symphonies of Beethoven and the statues in the Medici chapel ( p.244) .

Bradley, however, does concede that there are theatrically powerful scenes in the play — the two between Lear and Goneril and between Lear Goneril and Regan, and the ineffably beautiful scene in the Fourth Act between Lear and Cordelia. The fusion of the two plots is also superb. Nevertheless, what distinguishes King Lear from the other tragedies are not its dramatic qualities but strange imaginative effects. In an excellent paragraph Bradley gives us in a summarised form the main qualities of the play. ( He discusses them separately in a later section.) These imaginative qualities are as follows:

- (i) The immense scope of the work;
- (ii) the mass and variety of its intense experience;
- (iii) the strange combination of pathos and humour;
- (iv) its imaginative recreation of universal disorder;
- (v) the vagueness of its setting;
- (vi) its strange atmosphere;
- (vii) the half-realized suggestions of vast universal powers working in the world of individual fates and passions.

Bradley thinks that the above-mentioned effects are difficult to realize in the theatre. In the other tragedies there is not much conflict between imaginative effects and dramatic power. King Lear is deficient in this respect owing to its very excellence in other fields.

Bradley now goes on to discuss in some detail what he regards as the dramatic defects of the play. He begins first by discussing two scenes in the play which are generally supposed to be dramatically weak or improper but which Bradley regards as quite in place.

The first is the scene of Gloucester's falling off the Dover Cliff. Many people find this scene as absurd. Bradley, however, does not agree with this opinion. According to him, " the imagination and the feelings have been worked upon with such effect by the description of the cliff and by the portrayal of the old man's despair and his son's courageous and loving wisdom, that we are unconscious of the grotesqueness of the incident for common sense"(p.249) .

The next scene, generally considered to be dramatically defective is the opening scene of Lear's division of the Kingdom and the love-test. Bradley's position here in relation to modern views on the subject is interesting. The opening scene of the play was generally criticised in the nineteenth century for its lack of psychological verisimilitude. The general criterion for determining the success of a scene was the psychological consistency and truth to life of characters and situations. Bradley does seem here to accept the criterion as valid. We cannot deny the fact that upto a certain limit Bradley does subscribe to the critical principle

of psychological realism though, as we have repeatedly insisted, this principle is subservient to this philosophical conception of tragedy. The modern approach takes a different view of the problem. The criterion preferred now is that of theatrical effectiveness. It is also recognised that Shakespeare occasionally takes a situation as given without applying the criterion of life-likeness to it. In Measure for Measure, for example the Duke's temporary abdication and delegation of his authority to his deputies is not to be examined in terms of psychological realism. We are not to question his motives. We should rather take the situation as given though we may apply psychological criteria to the situation resulting from the given situation. Similarly, the division of the kingdom and the love-test are to be taken as given without anyone asking why it should happen. The opening scene, therefore is not to be examined in psychological terms. Moreover, modern criticism has generally rejected the principle of strict verisimilitude as applied to Shakespeare; symbolic, half-allegorical and poetic interpretation of the plays is much more common now than in the nineteenth century. Bradley, on the other hand, insists on psychological realism within the over-all tragic pattern in the plays. It is, therefore, necessary for him to defend the opening scene in King Lear in terms of verisimilitude.

The charge against Shakespeare says Bradley, is that Lear's division of the kingdom and the love - test are absurd. No sane person would perpetrate such an act. Bradley, however, believes that the scene is not incredible to the imagination. He thinks that Shakespeare has made some effort to remove the improbability of the legend. It was Coleridge,

Bradley points out, who first noticed that the division of the kingdom was already settled; its announcement and the love-test were only a formality. In line 38 we are informed that the division had already been drawn on the map of Britain. We also learn that Cordelia's share in the kingdom was perfectly known to Burgundy. Lear's scheme failed not because Goneril and Regan were exceptionally hypocritical but because Cordelia was exceptionally sincere. Thus Cordia's behaviour and its consequences were quite in character. Shakespeare has not, therefore, violated the principle of psychological realism in the opening scene.

It is further suggested, says Bradley, that Lear's plan to live with his three daughters in turn was absurd. Bradley does not agree with this view and suggests that Lear's plan was actually different. Lear had decided to live with Cordelia alone. His idea of living with Goneril and Regan alternately was born on the spur of the moment owing to Cordelia's behaviour. This, too, shows that the opening-scene is far from absurd or untrue to life. Bradley however, concedes that the scene is not effective in the theatre. Shakespeare should have given clearer hints. As it , the play discloses the true position of affairs "only to an attention more alert than can be expected in a theatrical audience or has been found in many critics of the play"(p.251). In the above Bradley seems to ignore the fact that what he regards as Shakespeare's carelessness may have been deliberate. We are not so sure now that Shakespeare himself, unlike his nineteenth century critics, accepted the principle of psychological coherence as an essential ingredient in dramatic art.



The other dramatic defects of King Lear, as mentioned by Bradley, may be summarised as follows:

The blinding of Gloster in full view of the spectators is a defect in King Lear as a stage-play though it may be justified as part of the play's imaginative effect.

The unhappy ending, too, is a defect if we are thinking of King Lear as a stage-play. Though Bradley would not approve of the changes in the revised version of Tate, he yet thinks that the deaths of Lear and Cordelia are unnecessary. Bradley's reasons are not sentimental but dramatic. The play successfully manipulates the tragic emotions and the task is already complete just before the deaths take place. In addition to this, Bradley also thinks that the deaths are not properly motivated; they depend on an accidental delay on Edmund's part. Bradley knows that some great authorities, including Lamb and Schlegel, are opposed to him. Still he would stick to the stand he has taken.

It may be pointed out that Bradley's position on this issue is closely linked with his interpretation of Lear's character. As we shall soon see, Bradley regards the play's tragic pattern to consist in Lear's redemption. He would go to the extent of calling the play as "The redemption of King Lear". As we have already pointed out in our first chapter, he discovers in King Lear the Hegelian conception of tragic reconciliation at the end. In view of his strong prejudice in favour of the reconciliation theory, he regards the deaths of Lear and Cordelia as unnecessary. These

deaths, so to say, disturb his view of tragic reconciliation at the end of the play. Many post-Bradleian critics, E.E.Stoll and Sir Walter Raleigh among them<sup>2</sup>, have taken a different view of the tragic pattern in King Lear. This, however, is an issue that will be taken up when we come to discuss Bradley's view of Lear's character.

Bradley now takes up the question of the many improbabilities and inconsistencies in the play. He regards them as defects in King Lear as a stage-play. However, he himself says that

- (i) the defects are insignificant and do not materially affect the play; and
- (ii) that Shakespeare was concerned with broad imaginative impressions and so he could afford to ignore the minor inconsistencies.

Bradley regards the vagueness of various locations as defects in the play. He believes that it might have been deliberate on Shakespeare's part. The vagueness of locations in Antony and Cleopatra was something that Shakespeare could not help; here, however, he was free but he chose to remain vague about the location of the various scenes.

In a separate section, Bradley deals with the peculiar imaginative effects of the play, a subject that had already been referred to in passing earlier. Bradley regards it as paradoxical that this defective drama should so overpower us " that we are either unconscious of its blemishes or regard them as almost irrelevant" (p.261). The very faults of the play constitute its excellence. The vagueness of locations, for example, brings it close to Prometheus Bound

by Aeschylus. The world of the play, says Bradley," is dim to us, partly from its immensity, and partly because it is filled with gloom, and in the gloom shapes approach and recede, whose half-seen faces and motions touch us with dread, horror, or the most painful pity — sympathies and antipathies which we seem to be feeling not only for them but for the whole race" (p.261).

The double plot, too, constitutes one of the play's imaginative beauties. The sub-plot reinforces the theme of the main plot. The repetition of the theme does not "simply double the pain with which the tragedy is witnessed; it startles and terrifies by suggesting that the folly of Lear and the ingratitude of his daughters are no accidents or merely individual aberrations, but that in that dark cold world some fateful malignant influence is abroad..." p.262).

There is an element of impersonality and abstraction in the characterization. The characters easily fall into two groups — those who love and the ones that are motivated by malice and hatred. Importantly enough, Bradley says that owing to the sharp division between the two groups of characters, the play comes very close to the medieval tradition of Morality drama. The remark is significant because it proves that Bradley's approach was not entirely un-historical. He was willing to give due consideration to the relevance of Shakespeare's dramatic heritage.

Surprisingly, Bradley anticipates not only the historical critics of the twentieth century but also the poetic school of Shakespeare critics — Caroline Spurgeon and others. He takes into account the predominance of animal imagery in the play. The play conceives man in terms

of animal life.

The above characteristics, according to Bradley, make the play unfit for stage. Bradley is thus in total agreement with romantic critics like Lamb who, too, had believed that the play was too huge for the stage. Bradley considers the storm scene to be the heart of the play, and this scene, according to him, cannot be acted. We have already referred to the opinion of Granville-Barker who thought that the storm scene was quite capable of being presented on the stage effectively. We need not repeat here ~~what~~ what has already been said on the subject earlier.

The conclusion of the play too which appears defective from the strictly dramatic point of view serves only to heighten the imaginative effect of the play. The catastrophe may distance King Lear from a play like Othello but it certainly brings it close to a work like the Divine Comedy. The deaths of all the main characters at the end forces on the reader certain questions of a metaphysical nature, including the one about the origin of evil. Thus the play makes up in the study what it loses in the theatre.

It is not only the play as a whole that raises questions of a philosophical nature; the characters themselves are placed in situations where they are forced to ask such questions. This, according to Bradley is a peculiar characteristic of King Lear alone, not found in the other plays. The play provides four different sets of answers to the ultimate questions. Bradley thinks that the play itself is undecided about the relative merits of the various attitudes. What, however, really matters is that the play

should raise such questions at all and not what the probable correct answer might be.

Bradley, however, does take up the questions of the ultimate meaning in King Lear in the last section of the first lecture: What does Shakespeare want to say about the place of man and the nature of the ultimate power in this greatest of his tragic works ? King Lear, according to Bradley, cannot be compared with the Divine Comedy since Shakespeare's play is not at all concerned with man's yearning for the Infinite. Shakespeare is, on the other hand, concerned with the terror and the agony of human life on this planet. The picture painted in King Lear is characterised by the ultimate in negation and despair. The malignity of Edmund and the two daughters of Lear is much more pronounced than that of Iago in Othello. The theme of ingratitude is the burden of both the plots in the play. Bradley gives evidence from the play to show that the ultimate powers are represented as malicious. The optimistic faith of Albany and Edgar<sup>3</sup> is sharply contrasted by the chain of events in the play. The agonised cry of Lear, "No, no, no life" is the keynote of the play. Following Dowden, Bradley now seeks to discover something in the biography of Shakespeare that would explain such intense concern with suffering in the play. In a long note on pp. 275-76, Bradley raises the issue though he dismisses it with the suggestion that the biographical angle is not much relevant to the criticism of the tragedies.

Bradley refers to Swinburne's views on King Lear. The great Victorian pessimist had discovered an affinity between the pervasive mood of the play and his own pessimistic stance.

Swinburne had compared the play with the works of Aeschylus and found it more pessimistic than the great Oresteian trilogy. Gloster's words, so thought Swinburne, in which man's life is compared with that of a fly, contains the key to the play's meaning. There is hope of divine justice in the plays of Aeschylus but "the darkness of revelation is here" in King Lear.

However, Bradley has to offer a different interpretation of the play, an interpretation quite in keeping with the view of Lear's redemptive experiential pattern. A really pessimistic work of art would produce the feelings of depression rebellion and despair. Since King Lear does not evoke such feelings, it cannot be regarded as pessimistic.

Is the play then optimistic ? Does it give us any grounds for religious hope ? Bradley does not think so. His view of the ultimate meaning of the play may be quoted in his own words:

"Its keynote is surely to be heard neither in the words wrung from Gloster in his anguish, nor in Edgar's words "the gods are just". Its final and total result is one in which pity and terror, carried perhaps to the extreme limits of art, are so blended with a sense of law and beauty that we feel at last, not depression and much less despair, but a consciousness of greatness in pain, and of solemnity in the mystery we cannot fathom" (p.279).

## II

We have seen in the last section that Bradley's concern in King Lear has been with the impression the play makes in the theatre and in the study. Characters, including that of the protagonist, are not given primary importance. That Bradley is wrong about the supposed dichotomy between the dramatic and imaginative qualities of the play may not detain us long. What really matters is the fact that his approach in the first lecture has not been psychological except perhaps in his discussion of the dramatic quality of the opening scene. So far as the play's wonderful imaginative effects are concerned, the Bradleian approach to the issues reminds us of the poetic criticism of the play in the twentieth century. Obviously, Bradley is not concerned with the underlying themes of the play, nor does he analyse the text so closely as to unravel its imagistic patterns or its symbolic overtones. Nevertheless, he does emphasize the latent Morality content of the play, its quasi-allegorical nature and its sharp thematic division between good and evil. Moreover, Bradley always speaks of the "impression" made by the play though he is equally concerned with the issues relating to verisimilitude. He would certainly expect psychological consistency and coherence in characters and the "reality" of the situations presented in the play. These assumptions, however, are not exclusive of the larger concerns with experiential and philosophical patterns.

It is in the second of his two lectures on King Lear that he takes up the characters, specially the character of Lear himself. Bradley begins by pointing out that Lear is

more sinned against than sinning. In this respect he is different from the other three great tragic heroes. In their case we remain conscious of their inherent tragic flaw till the very end. In Lear's case, however, we remain aware only of his suffering and the greatness of his nature. Whatever wrong he might be said to have done to Cordelia and Kent is soon forgotten. However all this, though true, should not make us oblivious of the fact that "the storm which has overwhelmed him was liberated by his own deed" (p.281). Thus, Bradley insists, the nexus which kinds together Lear's errors and his calamities should not be ignored. We do feel for his old age but Lear, on the whole, is not a pitiable character only; he is a tragic character also. Lear suffers at the beginning from a peculiar ignorance of human nature and of his own nature. We feel in Lear the presence of strength as well as weakness. Throughout his years of absolute power, he has been flattered to the top of his bent and this has produced in him "that blindness to human limitation, and that presumptuous self-will, which in Greek tragedy we have so often seen stumbling against the altar of Nemesis" (p.282).

Lear's tragic flaw is evident in his behaviour towards Cordelia. It is no less evident in his first encounter with Goneril. In his speech beginning "Hear nature hear; dear goddess hear ". We find the same disposition which we have encountered in his rejection of Cordelia. Lear has by this time become conscious of his error in rejecting Cordelia but this important self-realization has not so far produced any change in him: "the disposition from which his first error sprang is still unchanged" (p.284).



The perception of a link between Lear's tragic deed and his suffering does not diminish our pity for him but it certainly goes a long way in removing the impression that the tragic universe of the play is characterised by an arbitrary and malicious dispensation. In this respect the play is not much different from the other tragedies. This link between deed and suffering also envisages a world ruled by moral order and law. With a remarkable Victorian concern for causality and determinism Bradley comments: "It makes us feel that this world is so far at least a rational and a moral order, that there holds in it the law, not of proportionate requital, but of strict connection between act and consequence" (p.284).

King Lear is thus like the other tragedies in the respect of its deterministic link between deed and Catastrophe. It is, however, different from them in an important way. "There is nothing more noble and beautiful in literature than Shakespeare's exposition of the effect of suffering in reviving the greatness and eliciting the sweetness of Lear's nature" (p.284). Bradley's interpretation of the play comes very close to some modern readings; critic after critic in the present century has laid stress on the purgatorial nature of Lear's suffering. In an excellent paragraph, Bradley shows how his suffering totally transforms Lear. It is interesting to recall that Bradley envisages a change in Hamlet also. In his case, however the change is not purgatorial suffering leading to purification. According to Bradley, the changed Hamlet in Act V reveals a kind of negative passivity, a species of fatalism. Lear, on the other hand, is not only transformed but also ennobled.

Parts of the long sentence on pp.284-85 which describes Lear's transformation so exactly and yet so poetically may be quoted here:

The old King who in pleading with his daughters feels so intensely his own humiliation and their horrible ingratitude, and who yet, at fourscore and upward, constrains himself to practise a self-control and patience so many years disused; who out of old affection for his Fool, and in repentance for his injustice to the Fool's beloved mistress, tolerates incessant and cutting reminders of his own folly and wrong; in whom the rage of the storm awakes a power and a poetic grandeur surpassing even that of Othello's anguish;...who learns to feel and to pray for the miserable and houseless poor, to discern the falseness of flattery and the brutality of authority, and to pierce below the difference of rank and raiment to the common humanity beneath; whose sight is so purged by scalding tears that it seems at last how power and place and all things in the world are vanity except love...there is no figure, surely, in the world of poetry at one so grand, so pathetic, and so beautiful as his.

Significantly, at this stage in his argument Bradley calls King Lear "a poem". He also thinks that this poem could be entitled "The Redumption of King Lear". This is a good reminder to those critics who regard Bradley as a psychological critic with his sole interest focussed on the problem of verisimilitude in Shakespeare. Bradley's evaluation of King Lear is not much different from that of the poetic critics in the present century. If he forgets that the "poem", in King Lear, is really co-existent with the "play", then the poetic critics like L. C. Knights and

Wilson Knight, too, do the same. The poetic critics have less justification for calling a Shakespeare play a dramatic poem than Bradley since he, at the end of the nineteenth century with its naturalistic theatre, could not have been expected to appreciate the intensely dramatic qualities in the play.

Bradley now goes on to describe the process of Lear's purification. He gives an analysis of the third and fourth scenes of the Third Act of the play. In Act III, Scene iv Lear shows a profound concern with the suffering of others. This deep sympathy has been produced in him by the ordeal he himself has undergone. Lear's prayer ( "Poor, naked wretches...") is not for himself. It is for the houseless condition of the poor.

On the subject of Lear's madness Bradley makes only a point or two as, according to him, much has already been written. The first point relates to Lear's obsession with particular ideas. This is a clear symptom of insanity. Bradley thinks that in Lear's case Shakespeare wants to illustrate the idea that insanity is allied to genius. Lear's mad speeches, says Bradley, are pept by Shakespeare stylistically different from the sublime passages of poetry uttered by him earlier.

Bradley's next point relates to the fact that insanity brings to Lear a strange kind of wisdom and insight. Instead of the sublime poetry of the earlier phase, we have the power of moral perception and reflection which had been quickened in Lear by his suffering. This is a kind of inversion of madness in wisdom. This paradoxical situation

has been highlighted, in recent years, by Robert Heilman in his well-known book on the play.<sup>4</sup>

There is no recovery for Lear in the proper sense of the word. The spectator's anguish is increased by the thought that Lear dies not of pain but of joy. In his last moments, he imagines Cordelia to be alive, and the shock that it gives to him kills him. The idea that Lear dies of joy in the mistaken belief that Cordelia is alive has acquired the status of a well-known controversy. Bradley was the first to propound the theory. It has been echoed throughout in Lear criticism and occasionally controverted. As the subject is important fuller quotation is needed in order to let Bradley expound his theory:

And, finally, though Lear is killed by an agony of pain, the agony in which he actually dies is one not of pain but of ecstasy. Suddenly, with a cry represented in the oldest text by a four-times repeated 'O', he exclaims

Do you see this ? Look on her, look he lips,  
Look there, look there!

These are the last words of Lear. He is sure, at last, that she lives...To us, perhaps, the knowledge that he is deceived may bring a culmination of pain: but, if it brings only that, I believe we are false to Shakespeare, and it seems almost beyond question that any actor is false to the text who does not attempt to express, in Lear's last accents and gestures and look, an unbearable joy.

The opinion that Lear dies of joy was the product of an almost original interpretation of the text by Bradley. This idea as well as the one referred to earlier about the play being the story of Lear's redemption have had an interesting history in the post-Bradleian era. Katherine Cooke has given a brief account of the fortunes of these ideas in later Shakespearian criticism in her book on the influence of A.C. Bradley.<sup>5</sup>

Cooke mentions that the fate of Bradley's original perception about Lear's dying of joy illustrates "the waywardness of critical development and the erratic progress of seminal ideas" (Cooke, p.165). According to her, many critics have appropriated the idea as their own without referring to Bradley. P.N. Seigal, for example, expresses the opinion that Lear thinks Cordelia lives and so he dies of joy.<sup>6</sup> Seigal makes no suggestion that he derived the idea from Bradley though elsewhere he makes references to Bradley. H.S. Wilson, to give another example, expresses the same opinion without acknowledging his debt to Bradley.<sup>7</sup> Two other Shakespeare critics Fluchere and M.D.H. Parker do the same.<sup>8</sup> John Holloway, Cooke points out, commits another mistake: he attributes this well-known Bradleian idea to R.W. Chambers. He refers to "R.W. Chambers' opinion that both Gloucester and Lear die of joy".<sup>9</sup> Many other critics refer the idea to its source in Bradley but hedge in the opinion with the non-committal and qualifying phrase "if Bradley is right". J. Stampfer, however, rejects the idea because he connects it with Bradley's over-all interpretation of King Lear as a play exemplifying tragic reconciliation. Stampfer comments: "It is only by giving Lear's death a fleeting, ecstatic joy that Bradley can read some sort

of reconciliation into the ending, some renewed synthesis of cosmic goodness to follow an antithesis of pure evil".<sup>10</sup> Stampfer is, however, wrong since Bradley himself makes no connection between his interpretation of Lear's last speech and the general theory of reconciliation. There is no essential connection between the two. Indeed, the Bradleian interpretation of Lear's last speech — that Lear dies of joy — can be part of an utterly pessimistic reading of the play. As a matter of fact, such a connection has actually been made by William Empson. He thinks that Lear is mad again in the last scene and becomes "the eternal fool and scapegoat" imagining foolishly that Cordelia is alive. According to Empson, Lear has experienced everything and learned nothing.<sup>11</sup>

Empson has, incidentally taken a similar view of Bradley theory of the redemption of King Lear. It is interesting to note that the critics who seem to have an animus against religion in general or christianity in particular do not agree with Bradley. In fact, such critics (and Empson is one them) ridicule the idea of Lear's purgatorial suffering and consequent redemption. Those on the other hand, who incline for various reasons towards christianity seem to be greatly sympathetic towards Bradley though he was himself something of a late Victorian agnostic. Empson's criticism of Bradley's view of Lear's redemption may be quoted in full in order to show how some critics' religious inclination (or their opposition to religion) affects their critical judgment. On Bradley's view of the ending of King Lear, Empson comments:

Nothing matters except to build up a good character, and once that is done the sooner you die the better. Bradley does not put it so brutally.....I do not see what else he could have meant except that Cordelia would have become corrupted after a happy ending, so that the gods defended her in the only possible way. We can call this pessimism if like, he remarks, it is in the play, but cannot be prominent in it or the play would no longer be tragic. The main thing about this argument, no doubt, is that it succeeds in turning the blasphemies against the gods into the orthodox view held by Mrs Gamp that the world is Wale. I do not know how seriously he took his last little twist of piety, the view that Cordelia was sure to become corrupt. It is curious how often this puritan highmindedness can be found interlocked with an almost farcical cynicism. But even if involuntary it seems to be a reductio ad absurdum of his line of argument....This is not to deny of course, that pious members of an audience might adopt Bradley's point of view at any date.<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious that in his criticism of Bradley's view of Cordelia's death, Empson is less than just. Bradley nowhere implies that Cordelia would be corrupt if she did not die. What he actually said was that in the play Cordelia's death does not matter. What really matters is what she is. The more external — material well-being, survival and worldly happiness — are meaningless as compared with the satisfaction of having done, and being, good. We may here quote Bradley's own words from a later section of the second lecture:

The extremity of the disproportion between prosperity and goodness first shocks us, and then flashes on us the conviction that

our whole attitude in asking or expecting that goodness should be prosperous is wrong; that, only if we could see things as they are, we should see that the outward is nothing and the inward is all.

And some such thought as this...is really present through the whole play (p.326).

What Bradley is stressing here is the supremacy of the moral world. His "transcendental" interpretation of the play is not in categorically positive terms; there is a good deal of hedging, many reservations and qualifications, and "honest doubts". Bradley's interpretation does certainly come close to the many Christian readings of the play, yet there is in it a good amount of scepticism too. Bradley insists again and again that the play confronts us with a mystery which we cannot fathom, and that no explicit religious interpretation would be a valid one. King Lear, much more than the other tragedies has a potentiality of experience that could, but, in fact, does not, become religious. The intensity of its enshrined experience is the substance of which religion is made; it is not religion in itself.

The discussion of Lear's death has taken us too far afield and we have briefly discussed in the above paragraphs the issues relating to the ending of the play and the near-religious interpretation of the play given by Bradley. All this has shown us how closely concerned Bradley is with the philosophical issues raised by the play. The same kind of concern we notice in Bradley's discussion of the patently evil characters in King Lear — Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall and Oswald. Having dealt with them individually,



Bradley asks the question: " What are we to say of the world which contains these five beings ? ..." (p.303) . What are the philosophical implications of a tragic picture of the world in which evil seems to prosper in the way that it does in King Lear ? But the question is: does the play really show evil as prospering ? Bradley answers it in the negative. There is no doubt that the evil in King Lear is of a monstrous nature. " It is a tragedy in which evil is shown in the greatest abundance; and the evil chracters are peculiarly repellent from their hard savagery and because so little good is mingled with their evil" (.p.303) . The effect is both startling and appalling.

The evil characters in the play do thrive to a certain extent, and have the power to spread ruin and misery around them. The evil in the tragic universe of the play thrives on the foundations laid by good. At the same time, this evil is self destructive also: " the evil characters can scarcely unite against a common and pressing danger; if it were averted, they would be at each other's throats in a moment; the sisters do not even wait till it is past"(p.304) . The important issue, however, is :does evil really thrive in the play ? Apart from the fact that evil is self-destructive it does not thrive long. All the five evil chracters are dead a few weeks after we see them first: "the outburst of their evil is fatal to them" (p.304) . In view of all this Bradley finds it odd that Johnson should think that evil prospers in King Lear.

The moral scheme in the Play is quite clear for Bradley. The underlying idea in the play is that the world is really founded on good; that the world in fact is unfriendly towards evil. "Good, in the widest sense, seems thus to be the principle of life and health in the world; evil, at least in these worst forms, to be poison. The world reacts against it violently, and, in the struggle to expel it, is driven to devastate itself" (p.304).

Why should such devastating evil come into being at all ? There is no answer to this questions since the play is a tragedy. It is in the very nature of tragedy not to be able to answer such questions. A really satisfying answer would take us beyond tragedy and beyond the limits set by Shakespeare for his exploration of experience.

Bradley, however, does try to go beyond tragedy, to Shakespeare's mystical vision enshrined in the concluding part of The Tempest. Shakespearian Tragedy obviously is about the four great tragedies of Shakespeare, but if the reader is careful enough, he will notice that the book does seek to bring within its purview the entire gamut of Shakespeare's tragic work, and to relate his tragic work to the plays of his final period of which The Tempest is the most representative. There is, at the same time an attempt to discover in Shakespeare a pattern of growth. That Bradley in fact does so — discover a pattern of development in the Curve as a whole — has never been noticed, perhaps, for the reason that Shakespearian Tragedy has seldom been read carefully and as a whole. There are references to the early tragedies in the third lecture the one on Shakespeare's tragic period and on Hamlet. Titus Andronicas and Romeo and Juliet are

ignored by Bradley as early work. Then, Bradley points out, come the romantic comedies and the histories from 1594 onwards; there are no tragedies belonging to these half-dozen years, nor any dramas approaching tragedy" (p.80). What the significant of this fact is, Bradley does not say. It is, however, obvious that here Bradley is thinking in experiential, and not merely formal, terms. Julius Caesar is classed with Hamlet at the beginning of Shakespeare's tragic period. In both the tragedies evil is represented in a minor key; in fact, in Julius Caesar, according to Bradley, everyone means well. Evil becomes very pronounced in the tragedies after Hamlet, so much so that in King Lear we have monsters in the form of human beings. About evil in King Lear Bradley says: "...this strain of thought, to which the world appears as a kingdom of evil and therefore worthless, is in the tragedy, and may well be the record of many hours of exasperated feeling and troubled brooding" (p.327). Pursued further, the strain of thought (that the world is evil) may lead to utter nihilism, to the idea that the world is worthless and life without meaning. Pursued still further, the strain may lead us to the idea that the world is an illusion. The tendency towards this idea, according to Bradley, is traceable in King Lear "in the shape of the notion that this 'great world' is transitory, or 'will wear out to nought' like the little world called 'man' (IV.vi,137), or that humanity will destroy itself" (p.328). Bradley now significantly links the above chain of ideas in King Lear with its more developed form in The Tempest: "In later days, in the drama that was probably Shakespeare's last complete work, The Tempest, this notion of the transitoriness of things appears, side by side with the simpler feeling that man's

life is an illusion or dream, in some of the most famous lines he ever wrote..." (p.328). Bradley then quotes the passage, "Our revels now are ended..." which, according to him, is the culmination of the chain of thought in King Lear. The passage in The Tempest reveals "the whole mind of Shakespeare in his last years" (p.329). Prospero's anger at the thought of evil in the monster Caliban and his human confederates is soon replaced by a feeling of melancholy that leads him to the mystical thought that the world is an illusion. Prospero is aware of his failure, his inability to cure the monster and his human confederates of evil. Meanwhile, however, he has learned patience. This is what Lear also learns. From the vantage-point of The Tempest, Bradley looks back at King Lear and notices (in memorable words) the chain of ideas that constitutes Shakespeare's vision of life. This is, in fact what Bradley had all along been trying to discover. All other concerns, including the one relating to psychological verisimilitude, are subservient to, and perfectly fuse into, this central interest is Shakespearian Tragedy.

#### NOTES : CHAPTER FOUR

1. See Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, First Series (London,
2. See E.E. Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1933) and Sir Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare (London, 1907) .
3. Bradley fails to see that the thoughts of the characters are wrung out of experience, and that what really matters in the play is the existential situation in which each character finds himself.
4. Robert B. Heilman, This Great Stage (Baton Rouge, 1948) .
5. Katherine Cooke, op.cit., pp. 164-68.
6. P.N. Seigal, Shakespearian Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise (New York) pp. 183-85.
7. H.S. Wilson, On the Design of Shakespearian Tragedy (London, 1957) , p.204.
8. H. Fluchere, Shakespeare (London, 1953) , p.248 and  
M.D.H. Parker, The Slave of Life: A study of Shakespeare and the Ideal of Justice (London, 1955) , p.143.
9. John Holloway, The Story of the Night (London, 1961) , p.90.
10. J. Stampfer, " The Catharsis of King Lear"  
Shakespeare Survey, xxiii (1960) , pp. 1-10, p.5.
11. Quoted in J.K. Walton, "Lear's Last Speech",  
Shakespeare Survey 13 (1960) , pp. 11-19, p.17.
12. W. Empson, The Structure of Complex Words (London, 1951) , p.153. cited in Cooke, op. cit., pp. 172-73.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**CONCLUSION**

In this concluding chapter we propose to examine in some detail some of the main objections to Bradley's criticism of Shakespearian tragedy and the nature of his influence on the later criticism of the plays. We intend doing so in order to be able to arrive at an over-all assessment of Bradley's criticism of Shakespeare. The examination of the two subjects proposed above has obviously to confine itself to the criticism of Hamlet and King Lear since the study of the reaction against Bradley and his influence on twentieth century criticism is too wide a field to be covered in a work of such proportions as the present. Even within the narrow field of the criticism of Hamlet and King Lear we shall have to be selective in our approach and confine ourselves to the discussion of the general trends and tendencies only without reference to particular critics since the scope of the criticism of the two plays, particularly that of Hamlet, is too wide to be covered within the narrow confines of a brief chapter. The discussion of the trends in the reaction against Bradley will be of much value. In the first place it will help us see the directions in which Shakespeare criticism has moved in the twentieth century. Secondly, it will bring into focus the supposed or the real shortcomings in Bradley's criticism of the plays. Thus in the ultimate analysis, this discussion will help us in our own appreciation of Shakespearian drama which is or should be the goal of all critical endeavours.

We may begin with the immediate reaction, the critical response to Shakespearian Tragedy soon after its publication.

The book was reviewed in The Westminster Gazette by J.C.C. who was identified by Bradley himself as the late Victorian critic and scholar John Churton Collins. Collins, if indeed he was the reviewer, was an established authority at the time and quite influential. The fact that a critic of established reputation chose to attack Bradley in terms that remind us of the criticism of F.R. Leavis in its vehemence, goes to show that Bradley had certainly made his mark as a Shakespeare critic. There is reason to believe that Bradley's lectures as they were being delivered at Oxford were already receiving their due of appreciation, and that the publication of these lectures in the book form set the seal of recognition by the general public. J.C.C.'s criticism, however, was not inspired by pique only; there are, in the extract given below, hints of the kind of criticism which became common with the advent of the poetic school in the 'thirties. This is what J.C.C. had to say about Shakespearean Tragedy in his review in The Westminster Gazette (28 January, 1905):

The real point of interest and importance of the drama are not so much as touched on and the particularly with which what is touched on is dealt with is almost invariably in an inverse ratio to its interest and importance. Probably, for example, no intelligent reader of the play has ever had much difficulty in understanding Hamlet's relation to Ophelia — namely, that he was at first passionately in love with her that then misunderstanding her reserve, and thinking that she was in league with his enemies, he suspected and mistrusted her but that to the last something of his old love for her remained. This is discussed by Bradley under nine headings.... Every lecture teems with



those irritating superfluities, aggravated, it may be added, by the unnecessary difuseness with which they are discussed...Thus Professor Bradley treats us to special dissertations on such subjects as "Did Lady Macbeth really faint?" "Did Emilia suspect Iago ? " Had Lady Macbeth any children ?"

The concluding part of the extract given above immediately reminds us of L.C.Knights's attack on Bradley made much later. The notes at the end of Shakespearian Tragedy do not now appear as ridiculous as they once did to scholars and critics. We have already quoted John Bayley in an earlier chapter who remarked that the contents of the notes are not really as extraneous to a consideration of the plays as they appear at first sight. He significantly comments that the problem of Lady Macbeth's children must have had some kind of relevance to the design of the play in Shakespeare's mind even though we do not consider her to be a real figure outside the play. What Bayley is probably thinking of is the fact that the figure who appears in the play coaxing and exhorting her husband on to the path of violence and bloodshed does make a reference to having given suck to a child, and the play does present us with a sharp contrast between creativity and motherhood on the one hand, and death-like, life-denying cruelty, on the other. Moreover, as we shall see in our discussion of the criticism of Bradley by the poetic critics, the great plays of Shakespeare are not merely "statements of themes" but genuine human documents containing a vision of individual human destinies. Thus, the question whether Emilia did suspect Iago of villainy does cross our mind as we watch the play.

The same problem was raised in an article by the once well-known dramatic critic, A.E. Walkley. We have already quoted from his Times Literary Supplement article but a fuller quotation is here called for as it anticipates so well the main thrust of the criticism of Bradley by the poetic school. Walkley says:

From what we have been saying it must not be thought that we undervalue the really important part of Mr. Bradley's book, his scurpulously careful examination of the text and his skill in bringing all "into a concatenation accordingly" by means of the text. But to understand Shakespeare you have to supplement examination of the text by consideration of other matters, and it is here that we hold the Professor to be at fault. What is outside the text? He says (by implication) a set of real lives...We say, Shakespeare's dramatic needs of the moment, artistic peculiarities and available theatrical materials<sup>1</sup>.

Walkley does give credit to Bradley for basing his criticism of the plays on a careful study of the text. He also gives him credit for a comprehensive (philosophical?) scheme for the tragedies based on the text. However, Walkley criticizes Bradley for implying that a set of real lives exists outside the play. Walkley has to add the phrase "by implication" to his statement about what Bradley does in his criticism since so far as explicit statements are concerned Bradley nowhere says that the characters are independent of the text. Bradley wrote serious criticism of Shakespeare, not fanciful and sentimental biographies

of characters in the manner of The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines. Whatever psychological consistency or coherence he discovers in Shakespeare's characters, he does so within the purview of the text, not outside it. There is no denying the fact that he does consider verisimilitude of a psychological nature to be an essential element in the greater plays of Shakespeare. However, he does so only because he thinks it necessary for the spectator to be deeply concerned with the human destiny of the characters. The noteworthy thing in Bradley's criticism is his "skill in bringing all 'into a concatenation accordingly' by means of the text" — as Walkley himself has pointed out. What Walkley means by this "skill" is nothing but Bradley's ability to show the emergence from the text of Shakespeare's coherent, deeply tragic, vision of life and human destiny. And, here, Walkley is more in the right than he is fully aware of.

The two sets of immediate reaction to Bradley's Shakespearian Tragedy soon evolved into the more vocal criticism of his approach by what has been called the realistic school of Shakespearian criticism. This term was applied to the critical writings of Robert Bridges, E.E.Stoll and L.Schucking. This indeed is an odd assortment of critics since each one of them has a distinct approach with few things in common except a divergence from Bradley. Stoll, indeed, cannot be called a realist since in at least one important respect he was apposed to the realistic theories of drama. Why the three of them were called "realists" was probably for the reason that all of them

laid emphasis on the need for approaching Shakespearian drama in the context of Elizabethan age. Bridges was vehement in his insistence on the need to show that Shakespeare was lacking in art because he could not resist the unhealthy influence of his audience. Shakespeare's plays are full of inconsistent and psychologically incoherent characters and this was mainly due to the nature of the audience for which Shakespeare wrote his plays. Bridge's references are confined to Macbeth and Measure for Measure and not the plays we have considered in the present dissertation. Hence, the relevance of his criticism to Bradley's criticism of Hamlet and King Lear is only by implication though even such indirect relevance is important. In his Oxford lecture on "Shakespeare's Theatre and Audience" (1902), Bradley had touched upon the problem of the influence of Shakespeare's audience on his art. Surprisingly, his views are much in advance of his age and probably more true to the historical situation than those of Bridges. The lecture should be read by all those who wrongly believe that Bradley's criticism of Shakespeare was written in a kind of historical vacuum. Bradley is in tune with those modern scholars who believe that Shakespeare's audience had a much more trained and sensitive ear for poetry than modern audiences. They also had a more powerful imagination than the spectators have now. Bradley thought there was no disjunction between Shakespeare's intentions and the taste of the audience. Bradley says : "Probably Shakespeare never needed to think of the audience, but wrote what pleased his own imagination, which like theirs, was not only dramatic but, in the best sense, theatrical"<sup>3</sup>. Here Bradley seems to anticipate the objections raised by

Bridges and to provide an answer. The second lecture on construction, in Shakespearian Tragedy, envisages a perfect craftsman in Shakespeare who knew perfectly well how to execute his artistic intentions into a harmonious work of art and who encountered no difficulty in the process from any direction. The idea that King Lear is too huge for the stage is not based on the conviction that the dramatic failure is derived from the undue influence of the audience. In fact, Bradley is a-historical to the extent that he does not even remotely consider the possibility that the audience expectation might have in any way influenced Shakespeare either in his intentions or execution. In fact, the issue raised by Bridges is incapable of any close demonstration that any particular play or any specific dramatic problem in a play was influenced by the audience factor. So far as the question of the influence of spectator on Shakespearian drama in broad, <sup>E</sup>general terms is concerned, Bradley is perhaps closer to truth than Bridges in believing that, on the whole, Shakespeare's art appears to be in harmony with the audience expectations and taste. Shakespeare seems to be in love with his medium and to have welcomed the limitations imposed by it.

Stoll appears to be diametrically opposed to Bradley in his approach to Hamlet and King Lear and, indeed, to the total output of Shakespeare's dramatic imagination. He is right in insisting that a study of Shakespeare should be accompanied by a thorough knowledge not only of Elizabethan dramatic conventions but also of all fictional conventions.

No great art form exists in a historical vacuum. Great tragedy is rooted in melodrama. What is important in art is not similitude or exact life-likeness, but an illusion of life. Impression is everything in art. The spectator never tries to go behind the dramatic work, to the actual life from which the material of art may be supposed to have been borrowed. As a matter of fact, life is transformed into art through the medium of set conventions only and not independently. Thus, what exists outside art is not real life but a set of conventions that may have been used by other artists.

Stoll's interpretation of Hamlet is, accordingly, different from that of Bradley and his romantic predecessors. He believes that Shakespeare's Hamlet was a very different sort of play. The figure of the protagonist was not that of a weakling, a man in a supposedly tragic dilemma who delayed because he could not bring himself to act owing to subjective reasons of various kinds. We have already seen in our second chapter that P.S.Conklin, who has written the history of Hamlet criticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, believes that the Hamlet of those days was a heroic figure who did not delay for sentimental reasons. According to Conklin, the romantic Hamlet is not true to the original. Stoll would certainly agree with Conklin's conclusions.

Stoll thinks that the soliloquies where alone Hamlet gives expression to the thought that he is not carrying out his duties are not infact rooted in psychology. The soliloquy was a common dramatic convention in Elizabethan drama, and

in Hamlet, the self-accusations of the protagonist in the soliloquies are not intended to highlight the subjective dilemmas from which the protagonist suffers but to focus attention on the fact that a task is to be performed and to keep the reader informed about it. The soliloquies, therefore, are not psychological in the tradition of revenge tragedy and he could not, even if he wanted, introduce changes in the popular conception of the revenge. Shakespeare also knew that in writing his Hamlet, he could not easily deviate from the Ur-Hamlet and its plot. He was obliged, to keep his Kydian prototype intact with its inherent weakness of the delay. He could only slur over the fact of delay by reminding the audience that the assigned task was not being performed. Stoll says: "...even if Shakespeare had desired it, he could scarcely, on the contemporary stage, have introduced so fundamental an innovation as, in the place of a popular heroic revenger, a procrastinator, lost in thought and weak of will".<sup>4</sup> Stoll, thus, questions the very basis of the Goethe — Schlegel — Coleridge — Bradley Hamlet. It is difficult to resolve so fundamental a difference in critical approaches. We could only point out that Stoll is rather too rigid in allowing the creative genius of Shakespeare too little freedom in changing a popular tradition. Innumerable examples could be given of creative genius modifying, and sometimes even radically altering, a popular convention. The importance of the conventional element in art notwithstanding, the scope of individual talent, too, is not totally limited in artistic creation.

An interesting theory of the genesis of the text of Hamlet, propounded by J.M. Robertson<sup>5</sup>, too goes against the main trend of Bradley's interpretation of Hamlet. Robertson believes that the Q2 and F1 texts of Hamlet are a kind of palimpsest whose integrity as a finished work of art is questionable. According to him, the two texts are ultimately derived from an Ur- Hamlet which was probably composed by Kyd. The Ur-Hamlet was a primitive, unsophisticated and crude melodrama with a barbaric revenger. Shakespeare was assigned the task of revising it, and while he was engaged in the task he brought about a miraculous change in the character of the protagonist. Robertson would here agree with the Bradleian interpretation of Hamlet's character. Where he disagrees is in the question relating to Shakespeare's treatment of the plot. According to Robertson, Shakespeare was obliged to remain close to the original plot. The trouble arose when Shakespeare tried to impose a psychologically refined hero on to a crude, melodramatic plot. The present text is thus a palimpsest where two contradictory versions are forcefully joined together.

Robertson, thus questions the integrity of Hamlet as a work of art; this is entirely opposite to Bradley's interpretation of the play for whom no such problem exists. Robertson also encouraged T.S. Eliot<sup>6</sup> who called the play an artistic failure. According to him, the play fails because Shakespeare does not provide Hamlet with an adequate objective correlative for the expression of his emotions. He goes further and suggests that Shakespeare himself finds no adequate objective correlative in the play Hamlet for what he



is trying to express. Whatever his conclusions, Eliot does not differ from Bradley in his approach to Shakespeare in general and to Hamlet in particular. This is significant because the poetic approach to Shakespeare which is ultimately derived from a study of Eliot's poetry rejects Bradleian approach to Shakespearian drama.

Bradley's reputation reached its nadir during the 'thirties with the advent of New Criticism and its British variant. Wilson Knight, L.C.Knights, F.R.Leavis, Cleanth Brooks and others questioned the very foundation of the character approach to Shakespearian drama. R.B.Heilman whose book on King Lear, This Great Stage, makes a thorough poetic analysis of the play as a poem represents the culmination of this approach to the study of King Lear. The important thing to point out is that Heilman's study is not anything radically new; Bradley is probably the first critic to point out the paradox at the heart of the play: madness in reason and reason in madness. Similarly, Bradley also points out the other paradox embedded in the play: blindness in sight and sight in blindness. We have again and again insisted that Bradley is not a mere character-critic; in his criticism, Bradley seems to be concerned with the total impression made by the play, and the impact of imagery and symbolism is a necessary part of the total impression of a play. How could Bradley, then, have ignored such important ingredients of Shakespearian drama ? Our contention that the poetic interpretation of Shakespeare is, in its essentials, included in Bradley's approach, rests on three arguments. The first argument rests on the point

that Bradley repeatedly and throughout insists on "the impression" made by the play. He does not ask us to go beyond the play to the real lives of the characters but to confine ourselves to the general impression made by the play. It is obvious that the general impression would include the impact of the language and the atmosphere in the play. Secondly, Bradley does specifically refer to the animal imagery in King Lear suggesting that this imagery makes us conceive man in terms of animal existence. Lastly, in his lecture on King Lear he points out that the play comes very close to being an allegory in its clear-cut division of characters between good and evil. Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that certain features of the poetic interpretation of Shakespearian drama are present in Bradley in seminal form.

The above discussion of the post-Bradleian criticism of Hamlet and King Lear was not aimed at being representative in any way. The intention was to suggest in outline that the later developments have not made Bradley entirely irrelevant or out-dated. The wheel has come full circle, and the reaction against character-criticism is a spent force now. It is realized now that the study of character cannot altogether be banished from the field of dramatic appreciation. Character in some sense is an essential ingredient of the dramatic art and we cannot eschew it completely in favour of the other elements based in language — imagery, symbolism or themes. Moreover, it is obvious to any serious student of Bradley's Shakespearian Tragedy that

character is not for Bradley the sum and substance of Shakespeare's dramatic art. The value of his work lies in his skill in bringing all "into a concatenation accordingly" by means of the text. His synthesis of the Shakespearian criticism of the nineteenth century will remain valid as long as a new synthesis, incorporating elements of the poetic and historical criticism of Shakespeare in the twentieth century, does not replace it entirely. That such a synthesis is yet to appear determines the question of the relative validity of Bradley's approach to Shakespearian tragedy.

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NOTES : CHAPTER FIVE

1. T.L.S. 7 April, 1905. Reprinted in A.B.Walkey, Drama and Life (New York,1907) ,p.153. Cited in Cooke, op. cit.,p.3.
2. Robert Bridges, " The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama"(1907) , Collected Essays (Oxford,1927) . E.E.Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare ( Cambridge,1933) . L.Schucking, Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays (London,1922) .
3. " Shakespeare's Theatre and Audience" in Oxford Lectures on Poetry ( London,1909) , p.392 n.
4. Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, p.94.
5. J.M. Robertson, The Problem of "Hamlet" (London,1919)
6. T. S. Eliot, " Hamlet", Selected Essays (London,1951) .

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